

retro GAMER Collection

A Guide To Video Gaming 1979 To 2008

VOLUME TWO

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE



256 PAGES OF CLASSIC RETRO GAMING INSIDE

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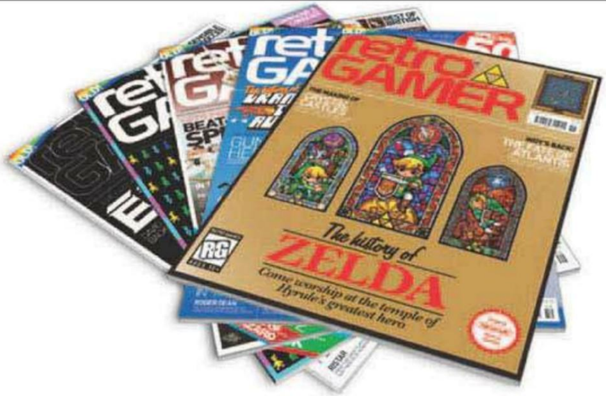
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ISBN 978-1-906078-13-3

IMAGINE PUBLISHING



It's here! Our second anthology is better than ever!



retro GAMER COLLECTION

So, here we are then. *Retro Gamer* has now been running for over 50 issues and it shows absolutely no sign of slowing down. Saved from death by Imagine Publishing, I feel it has truly evolved into one of the most unique gaming magazines on the market, with fascinating content and coverage that our peers can only dream of. Over the past two and a half years we've secured some truly amazing articles and constantly striven to bring you the very best retro stories around. We've tracked down key developers from the good old days, interviewed some of Japan's leading creators and dug up the dirt on more games than we'd care to remember, and all because we've wanted to create the very best magazine for our loyal readership. Therefore this second collection serves two purposes. It will hopefully work as a great companionship to the existing magazine, as it features some of our strongest ever articles and should also prove to be the perfect springboard to those of you who have often picked the magazine up, but have never actually taken the plunge before. Regardless of whether you're new or old to the magazine, we're confident that you'll find some of the most comprehensive and informative features around within these lavish pages.

Enjoy.

retro* GAMER Collection

THE CLASSIC GAME ANTHOLOGY

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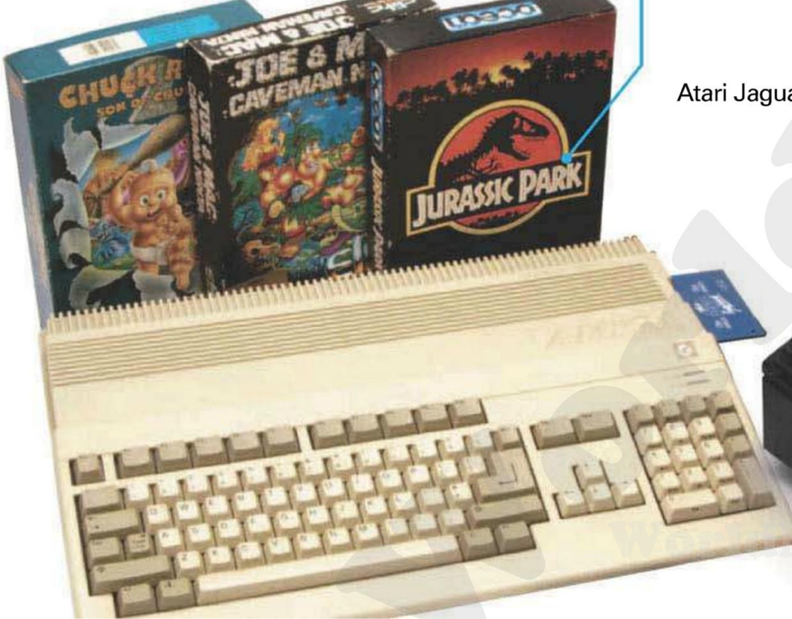


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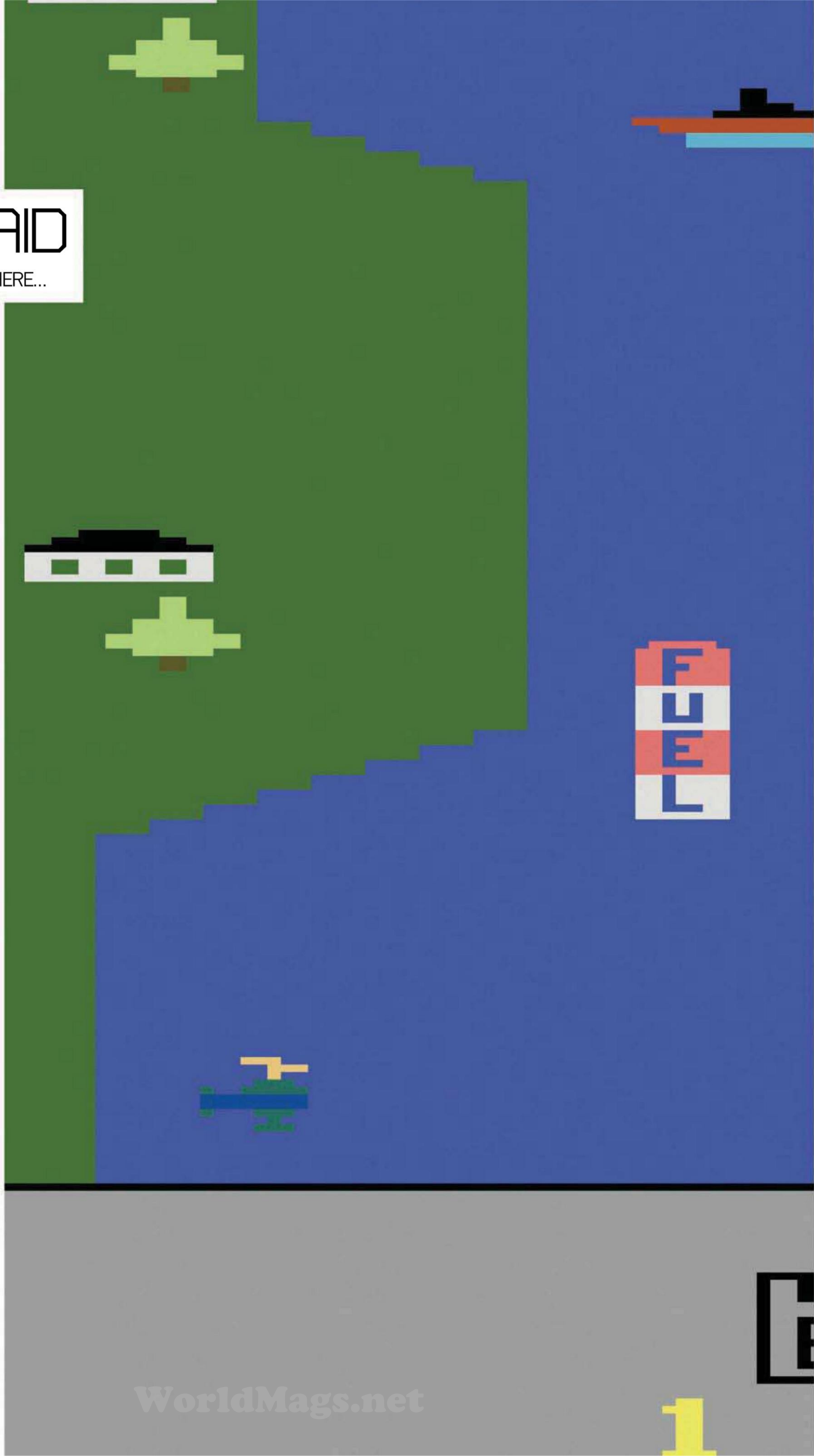
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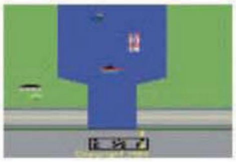






RIVER RAID

IT ALL HAS TO START SOMEWHERE…



- **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI 2600
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

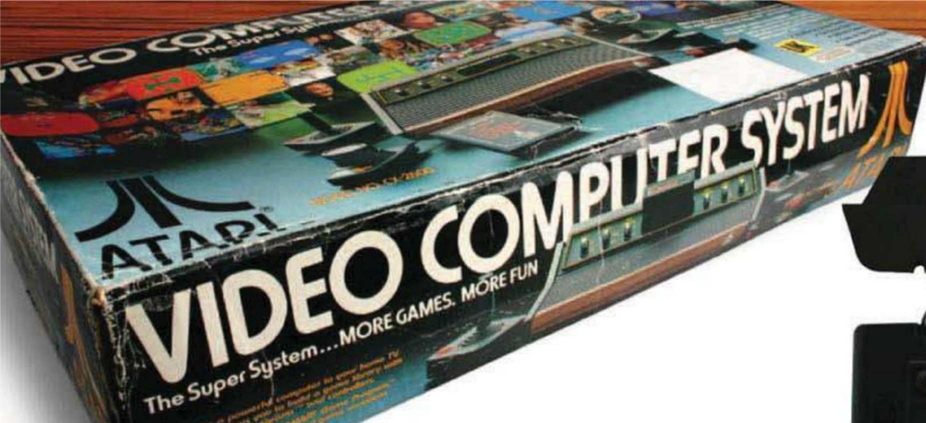
Every gamer has a favourite genre. Some love the depth of a good beat-'em-up, while others prefer the long love affair that comes from finding a truly excellent RPG. Others prefer puzzlers, and then you'll get those that are mad for platformers. For me, it's an unhealthy obsession with shoot-'em-ups. Rather than bore you with how I think they're gaming in one of its purest forms, I'll simply mention where my frightful habit stemmed from: Activision's *River Raid*.

While the world and his dog were going mad for the likes of *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*, all my spare time was focused on a tiny jet fighter and getting it to progress up a river as far as I possibly could. Like many Activision titles, *River Raid* really showed off the Atari 2600's power and delivered a title that blew me away with its smooth scrolling, detailed visuals and raucous sound effects.

As with many others before me, I had already cut my teeth on shooters such as *Space Invaders*, but *River Raid* was a totally different experience. Watching the slowly changing landscape was mesmerising, almost to the point where I'd forget to shoot down those pesky helicopters. What really made *River Raid* for me, though, was its perfect balance of knowing exactly when to fire. Fuel canisters were dotted throughout the constantly moving river and gave you two choices: did you take them out for extra points, or use them in order to progress that little bit further? As the game progressed, the barrels began to pop up with less regularity, so earlier decisions made in the game would normally come back to haunt you at the most inopportune of moments. Score mechanics have always played an important part in shoot-'em-ups over the years, and while the simple introduction in *River Raid* comes nowhere near the complicated strategies seen in the likes of *Ikaruga* or *Mushihimesama*, it was fascinating to witness at the time.

It may not feature the sort of frenetic blasting that's become part and parcel of many of today's shooters, but *River Raid* remains a true classic. Now where are my old Atari paddles?


1880
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ACTIVISION



Year released: 1978

Original price: £169

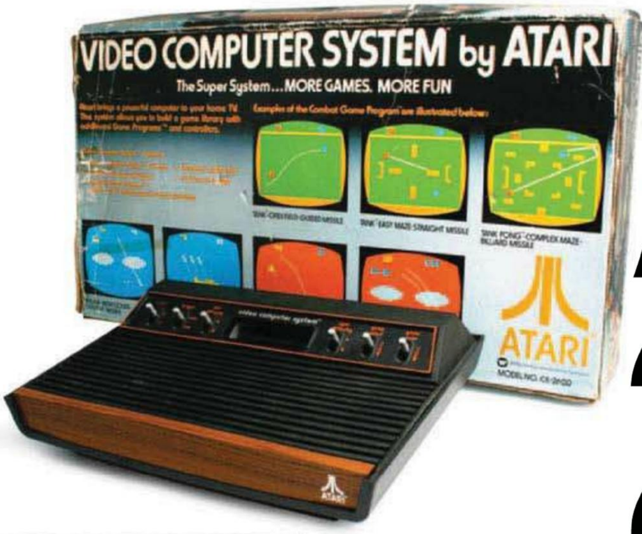
Buy it now for: £30+

Associated magazines: TV Gamer

Why the Atari 2600 was great… Even today the Atari 2600 is a thing of beauty. Built to last and featuring that famous wooden veneer, few things in life could give us as much pleasure as a day spent in front of the TV playing *Space Invaders* or *Combat*. It may have all ended in tears for Atari, but the 2600 remains one of the defining aspects of its legacy.







ATARI 2600



CHANCES ARE THAT YOU OWNED THE ATARI 2600 – THE BEHEMOTH OF THE GAMING INDUSTRY FROM THE GENIUS THAT IS NOLAN BUSHNELL AND A LEGEND IN ITS OWN RIGHT. THE 2600 WAS TO BECOME AN OVERNIGHT SENSATION, INTRODUCING MILLIONS OF MINDS TO THE WONDROUS BEAUTY OF VIDEOGAMES, AS WE DETAIL IN THIS SPECIAL RETROSPECTIVE…

To this day, the Atari 2600 VCS (video computer system) is a gaming phenomenon, which in the late-1970s, was a multi-million dollar industry with over 30 million consoles sold worldwide and hundreds of millions of cartridges produced over three decades. Quite literally, if it wasn't for the Atari 2600 making it possible to have home videogaming for the masses on an affordable budget, then today's videogaming industry – which is more profitable than the movie and music industry combined – might have been a different story. Whereas the 2600 was revolutionary to the videogaming world in terms of its world dominance and game catalogue, it was also built to last – a gaming equivalent of a Swedish log cabin; early models resembled a mini-Panzerkampfwagen with wood panelling in the style of a Station Wagon powerhouse. One website, that shall remain anonymous, also provides tips on how to convert the indestructible joystick into a vibrating sex toy to appease the girlfriend; the quality of build is something that German engineers would have been envious of – 'vorsprung durch technique Atari'.

In 1972, Nolan Bushnell, Ted Dabney and Warner Communications set up shop with Atari Computers and the rest is, as they say, history. Three years later, Atari released *Home Pong* and it was a huge success, thanks to Sear's marketing campaign and Bushnell's genius (who was to become the Ray Winstone of the gaming world). Influenced by the Channel F console – the world's first electronic system to use a microchip – Atari followed suit in 1977 with the 2600 VCS that was complemented by nine cartridge games, including *Outlaw*, *Space War* and *Breakout*. The 2600 was to be gaming gold and legend has it that demand

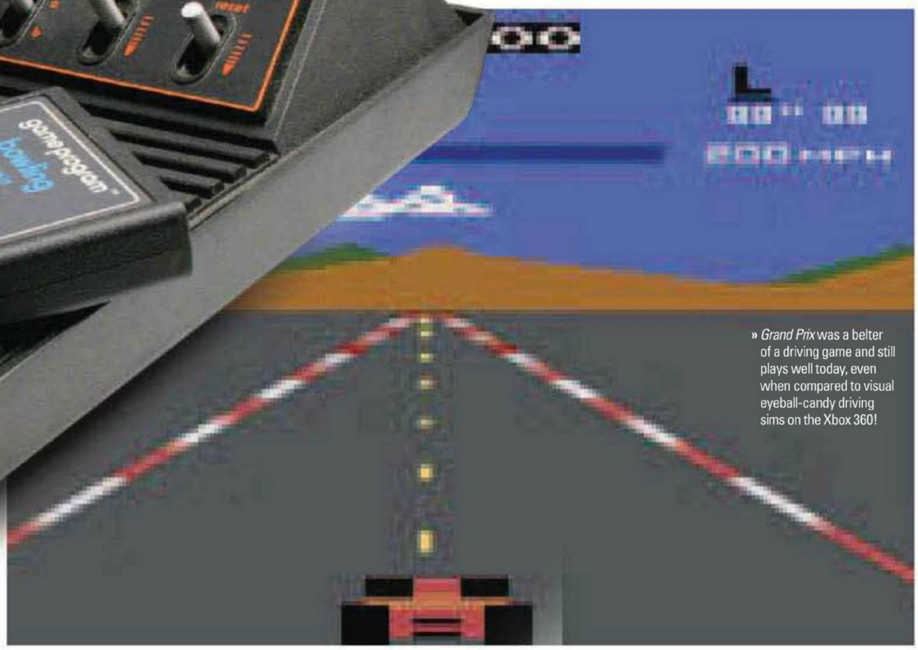
Origins

The name of 'Atari' originates from one of the world's oldest board games, Go, which Nolan Bushnell was known to enjoy playing and denotes the following: "a group of stones is in Atari if it has only one liberty left." As for the Atari symbol, it was designed by George Opperman in the early 1970s. By all accounts, *Pong* was very popular and the large letter 'A' represented two opposing videogame players with the centre of the Pong court in the middle. Got that? As for classic 2600 games that we still love playing, you really can't go wrong with: *Combat*, *Demon Attack*, *Adventure*, *River Raid*, *Solaris*, *Pitfall!*, *Yars' Revenge*, *Kaboom*, *Frogger*, *Haunted House* and *H.E.R.O.* Also, the Intellivision was not the only system to feature voice synthesis, as the 2600 also had *Open Sesame* and *Berzerk* – the latter being an enhanced but hacked version. Bless…

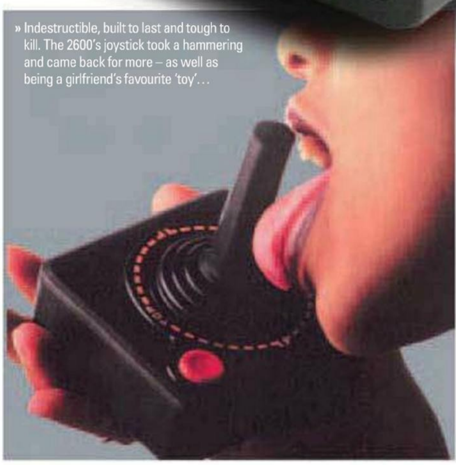


» **This is *Go*. It's loved the world over thanks to its challenging and deep gameplay and is held in particularly high regard in Japan.**





» *Grand Prix* was a belter of a driving game and still plays well today, even when compared to visual eyeball-candy driving sims on the Xbox 360!



» Indestructible, built to last and tough to kill. The 2600's joystick took a hammering and came back for more – as well as being a girlfriend's favourite 'toy'…



» The original console of the Atari 2600 released in 1977. With wooden panelling from a Swedish log cabin and immune to damage, it was alleged that the basic design was influenced from German weapon technology from 1945…



» In the early 1980s, the very sight of the 2600 was to be every schoolboy's wet dream and Santa soon had his elves making millions of them.



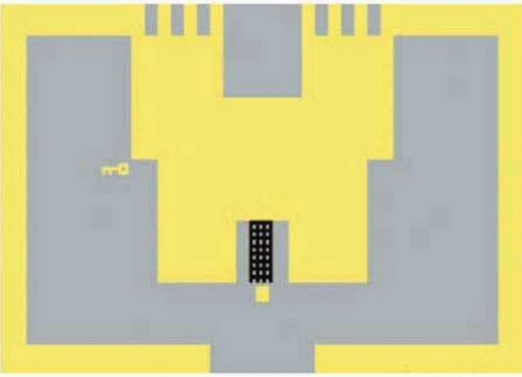
» One of the classic retro 2D action/adventure games: Activision's *Pitfall!*. Quite why brick walls exist in secret underground chambers in a forbidden jungle is anyone's guess…



was so great over the Christmas festivities, that Atari executives helped man the production lines so that the public's hunger for the video sensation was satisfied.

Overnight, the Atari 2600 was raking in millions of dollars and mainstream corporate companies paid close attention to the new form of home entertainment. In 1978, Warner Communications bought Atari and Bushnell left the company in search of other challenges by buying Pizza Time Theatre. A year later, and with more financial backing to boost development of software and marketing, the 2600 was graced with a further 12 games; but stiff competition in the shape of the Magnavox Odyssey 2 and the Mattel Intellivision – the latter being the world's first 16-bit console – threatened Atari's monopoly. The Intellivision was the strongest contender to the Atari by boasting more graphics power, a highly inventive gaming pad (which, some say, has only just been surpassed by Nintendo's Wii) and innovative peripherals such as a keyboard and voice synthesis module. The Intellivision may have stomped in the clay footprint set by Atari, but in a short period of time, Mattel's machine had shifted over 4 million units: something had to be done before the 2600 would be superseded by the opposition. The answer came in 1980 with a gaming smash hit from Japan: *Space Invaders*. The arcade conversion to the 2600 proved to be a monstrous success with scores of people buying the console just so they could play the game and more were converted to the Atari cause when *Adventure* was released shortly afterwards. And in gaming history, *Asteroids* and *Lunar Lander* were the first two videogames to be registered in the US copyright office. The face of videogaming was changing rapidly – everyone wanted a piece of the action and things were going to get real ugly.

Four disgruntled Atari employees left the company to form Activision – a third-party outfit to drag from the coattails of the 2600 and release its own games in 1980: *Boxing*, *Checkers*, *Fishing Derby* and *Dragster*. Arguably, Activision's titles were better in quality than the ones that the 2600 had to offer and Atari was not pleased that other parties were taking a slice of the pie and promptly sued. And lost – the giant cash cow that was Atari was forced to resign to the fact that other companies could release their own titles that were compatible with the 2600 and Activision made over 70 million dollars in one year alone. 1981 was to be a gaming duel between the Atari and the Intellivision – in playgrounds across



» Many retro gamers lost hours of their lives and girlfriends to the Atari 2600's *Adventure* – one of the very first RGP games that moulded and influenced the genre.

America, schoolboys would bicker over which system was superior to the other but Atari finally won in a battle of attrition; like the confrontation between VHS and Betamax in the early 1980s, Atari had the edge due to market dominance.

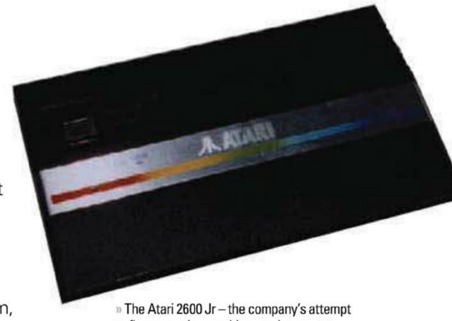
To beat the stranglehold of the 2600 in the marketplace, Coleco believed that a graphically advanced machine would beat the ageing Atari and released the ColecoVision in 1982. In response, Atari launched the 5200 – a more powerful machine on terms with Coleco's – and lowered the cost of the 2600 by a hundred bucks. Once again, Atari ruled the roost and its dominance assured that the ColecoVision went the same way as the Intellivision, and Arcadia released the Supercharger – a device that played games on an audio cassette and allow multi-loads. A slew of third-party companies gave Atari a vote of confidence and joined the fray – such as CBS, 20th Century Fox, Tigervision and many more (even X-rated games were available for the more mature gamer via Mystique) – so long as Atari were presented with a percentage of the profits. Sales were strong, despite the 2600's age and more games were released such as *Pac-Man* and *ET*, which were critical and commercial disasters. Urban myth states that the movie studio behind *ET* gave Atari less than two months to plan, develop and distribute the 2600 game in time to hit the US theatrical release. Only recently have the software developer and movie studio not been at loggerheads when it comes to film game adaptations, and predictably with such unrealistic delivery deadlines, *ET* was rushed and proved to be an satisfactory game; sales were allegedly so low, that a million cartridge units were buried in the Nevada desert.

It was the beginning of the end; there were too many games to meet demand, third-party companies began to fold and the gaming crash was in full swing. Desperate times demand desperate measures, and to compensate for the lack of sales, Atari reduced the 2600 to 40 dollars in 1984 and had announced the release of the 7800 and a more sophisticated 2600 with better graphics.

Which suggested that the end was nigh for videogames and that the fad had passed. Warner Communications sold its home videogame division of Atari to Jack Tramiel who believed that home computers would replace consoles. Tramiel snuffed out all new Atari releases and put an emphasis on the Commodore 64.

Financial experts predicted that the videogame industry was kaput, the bubble had burst and that the future for home entertainment relied on home computers as a new gaming conflict commenced between the Sinclair Spectrum, Commodore 64, Dragon 32 and others. However, in 1986, Nintendo surprised everyone with the release of the NES console, which was a US sales blitzkrieg – every kid wanted one! Sensing there was more life in the old dog, Atari then sold the newly designed 2600 as the Atari 2600 Jr for less than 50 dollars, as well as the 7800 that had been gathering dust in storage for over a year. Videogames were, once again, the big thing and in 1987 Atari released *Jr Pac-Man* and sub-licensed a number of established games from other companies, such as the wonderful *Donkey Kong* – a title that allowed the 2600 to print money. As 1987 had passed, Atari executives realised that the 2600 was coming to the end of its natural shelf life – an astonishing achievement for a gaming machine over ten years old – as well as having to compete with more advanced systems. Nolan Bushnell was rehired by Atari, who then manufactured a small number of titles including *Secret Quest* as a final swan song to a console classic and as a way of squeezing the last fistful of cents from the machine. By 1989, the production lines for the 2600 finally ground to a halt as the final units were shipped across the US, although foreign sales and distribution continued for a short period of time. It was time for the 2600 to throw in the towel, retire and look back at what it had achieved through gaming history.

If it wasn't for the 2600 and its influences on the videogame industry, what we take for granted today might have been very different, especially if Jack Tramiel had his way. The 2600 was a high-quality machine with an incredible range of games to choose from, and all genres were catered for – from educational titles to arcade, puzzle and strategy – and it was all available in spades. And the retro gaming rebellion has sparked new life into the 2600 as hobbyists collect and sell the console and cartridges all over the world, as well as Jakks Pacific's fabulous TV Games Atari joystick that features a selection of great games such as *Missile Command* and *Scramble* – how good is that?! And besides, with a modern-day game that comes complete with a manual the size of the Yellow Pages and a learning curve that will consume the best part of your life, you really can't go wrong with the Atari's pick up and play.



» The Atari 2600 Jr – the company's attempt to flog an ageing machine at a low cost to the masses.



Close but no cigar

Sadly, a number of titles for the 2600 never saw the light of day and were to become a retro gaming myth. The classic hardcore skin flick, *Debbie Does Dallas*, was announced in 1982 by American Multiple Systems but was canned before completion; one can only wonder what the gameplay would have been like but it might have been similar to the *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* joystick 'waggle'… The cult comedy movie *Airplane!* was also canned, as was *B-52 Bomber* (which might have given you the opportunity to carpet-bomb Iraq and Afghanistan). One game that definitely deserved to have been released was *Attack Of The Baby Seals* – quite possibly a schlock B-movie horror title but one that sounds rather wondrous.

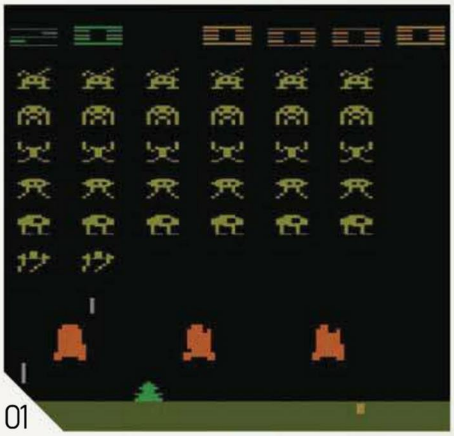
Unsurprisingly, movie tie-ins were popular from *Jaws*, *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*, *MASH*, *Magnum PI* and *Porky's* – the latter an amazing U-turn in gameplay where the movie's narrative was altered so that sex-crazed teenagers were changed to that of pigs – nice.



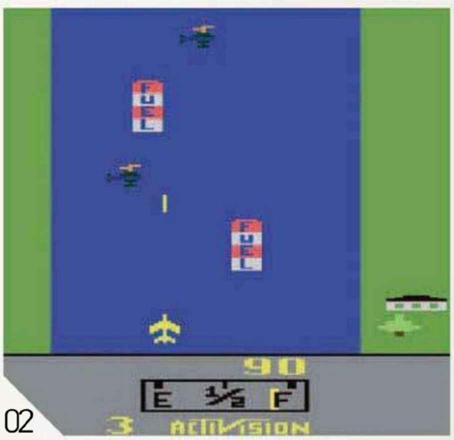
» **We could easily imagine a game based on the hit comedy *Airplane*, but *Debbie Does Dallas?* The mind boggles…**

PERFECT TEN GAMES

The Atari 2600, or VCS as it was more commonly known, has a huge catalogue of games and we've had a real hard time nailing down just ten of our favourites. Before you write in, though, any top ten is going to be entirely subjective and, of course, open to violent debate, and that's what Retro Gamer is all about. Like-minded gamers indulging in sheer nostalgia. Bring it on!



01



02

SPACE INVADERS

» **RELEASED:** 1980
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
» **CREATED BY:** RICK MAURER
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MAZE CRAZE

01 Don't be fooled by the ancient-looking visuals, *Space Invaders* was one of the earliest 'killer apps' and proved a massive hit when it was first released.

It may not be arcade perfect (there were only 36 on-screen invaders compared to the arcade's 55), but *Space Invaders* had plenty of different options, 112 in fact, which was a staggering amount at the time and greatly enhanced what was already a great game. Moving shields, zig-zagging bombs, invisible invaders, two players on screen at once, guided missiles – the list was virtually endless. If you don't have a copy of *Space Invaders* in your collection then you're doing your VCS a huge disservice.

RIVER RAID

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACTIVISION
» **CREATED BY:** CAROL SHAW
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** 3D TIC-TAC-TOE, CHECKERS, POLO

02 *River Raid* was a huge departure for Carol Shaw; especially when you consider that the majority of her previous VCS games had been based on simple parlour games.

The never-ending river you flew up was filled with a variety of dangerous hazards and the further you made it up the river, the more dangerous the challenge became (we didn't mind, though, it looked amazing). Not only were you up against dangerous opponents, you also had a limited amount of fuel to worry about, which became scarcer and scarcer as the game progressed. A classic shooter no collector should be without.

BERZERK

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
» **CREATED BY:** DAN HITCHENS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SWORDQUEST: EARTHWORLD

03 Like many 2600 arcade conversions, *Berzerk* wasn't perfect. For starters, the voice synthesis from the arcade game was nowhere to be seen (although this was later added in an enhanced version), the graphics gave the game a more claustrophobic feel than its arcade parent and the enemies couldn't fire diagonally, thus making it easier to play. Despite these niggles, it remains a great conversion mainly because of its simplistic gameplay and solid controls. Negotiating the mazes took steady nerves and a fair amount of patience and strategy. If you're a fan of shooters, track this down as quickly as possible.

ADVENTURE

» **RELEASED:** 1980
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
» **CREATED BY:** WARREN ROBINETT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MAZE, SLOT RACERS

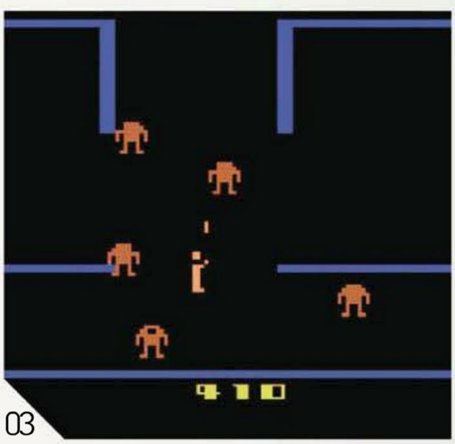
04 *Adventure* is perhaps one of the crudest-looking games on the 2600. Your lead character was nothing more than a simple block, many of the rooms were sparse even by VCS standards and the less said about the dragons the better…

Nevertheless, it was one of the most involving titles available for Atari's first console. With a simple premise (return a stolen chalice to a castle) and some great gameplay mechanics – several items can be picked up along the way to help your progress – *Adventure* remains a landmark title and an essential addition to your VCS library.

MS PAC-MAN

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
» **CREATED BY:** MIKE HOROWITZ, JOSH LITTLEFIELD
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

05 Even the most avid 2600 owner will tell you that Atari's original *Pac-Man* was an appalling conversion. The game had obviously been rushed and disgruntled gamers poured scorn upon Atari. Atari had obviously been listening, though, as *Ms Pac-Man* was a huge improvement. While the visuals weren't arcade perfect, they captured the spirit of the original and, this time around, the main character actually looked like her arcade counterpart. Add in spot-on controls, faithful sound effects and near-perfect gameplay that perfectly mimicked the arcade game and *Ms Pac-Man*'s success was assured.



03



04



05





06



07



08

H.E.R.O.

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACTIVISION
» **CREATED BY:** JOHN VAN RYZIN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** F-18 HORNET, COSMIC COMMUTER

06 Activision certainly churned out some quality titles for the Atari 2600 and *H.E.R.O.* was no exception. Taking control of Roderick Hero, the aim was to use your propeller backpack to venture into the 20 dangerous mines and rescue all the miners. *H.E.R.O.* was typical of many Activision titles in that it was very polished and featured some solid gameplay. While there was no actual music to speak of, there's a wealth of impressive effects that really added to the game's atmosphere and the ever-decreasing power in Roderick's jetpack ensured that every game remained a tense challenge. Great stuff.

DEFENDER II

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
» **CREATED BY:** BILL ASPROMONTE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MILLIPEDE, PENGO

07 *Defender II* (or *Stargate* as it is also known) is another great arcade conversion for the 2600 and a damn fine shooter to boot. Unlike the original *Defender* (which was a pretty poor conversion), its sequel got everything correct and featured visuals that were extremely reminiscent of the arcade hit. The action was fast and furious, sprite flickering was kept to a bare minimum and there were plenty of meaty sound effects to enjoy. Add in the fact that none of the original controls were sacrificed and you have yet another cracking title that certainly deserves a special place in your collection.

PITFALL! II: LOST CAVERNS

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACTIVISION
» **CREATED BY:** DAVID CRANE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CANYON BOMBER, GHOSTBUSTERS

08 While the original *Pitfall!* is still a fantastic game, we constantly find ourselves returning to its superior sequel whenever we fancy participating in some jungle antics. Thanks to the cartridge containing its own chipset, the visuals in *Pitfall! II* were very advanced for their time and were complemented by an extremely impressive soundtrack – indeed, technically *Pitfall! II* remains one of the best-looking and sounding games that we've ever played on Atari's console. If you're looking for a tense platformer, *Pitfall! II* should be tracked down at all costs.



09

ICE HOCKEY

» **RELEASED:** 1981
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACTIVISION
» **CREATED BY:** ALAN MILLER
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BASKETBALL, CHASE, ROBOT TANK

09 There were plenty of sports titles available on the Atari VCS, but few came close to the greatness of Alan Miller's excellent *Ice Hockey.* It's only two-on-two, and the graphics were rather simplistic to say the least, but none of that matters in the slightest, as the all-important gameplay more than delivered. You had a surprising amount of control over both your players, the action was fast and furious and, once you got the hang of it, you could pull off shots from a variety of different angles. It was even possible to check opponents and send them crashing to the floor if you couldn't regain control of the puck. Another great title from Activision that needs to be owned.

THRUST

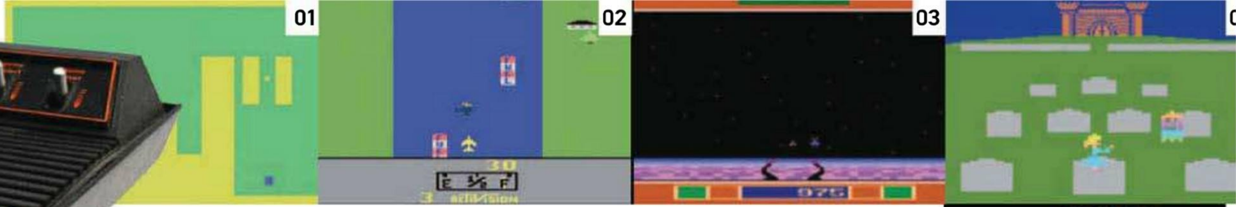
» **RELEASED:** 2000
» **PUBLISHED BY:** XTYPE
» **CREATED BY:** THOMAS JENTZSCH
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JAMMED, STAR FIRE, SWOOPS!

10 There's an amazing array of homebrew titles currently available for the 2600, but Thomas Jentzsch's *Thrust* remains one of our favourites and shows off just what Atari's console can be capable of in the right hands. It was a great conversion of the original Commodore 64 classic and featured some very impressive visuals and a real sense of inertia that made it a joy to play. There was some fantastically smooth scrolling on display and the controls themselves were superb, meaning that you'd never blame them when you inevitably crashed into the desolate landscape. Don't turn your nose up at its homebrew status, *Thrust* was a superb title for the 2600 and deserves to be played.



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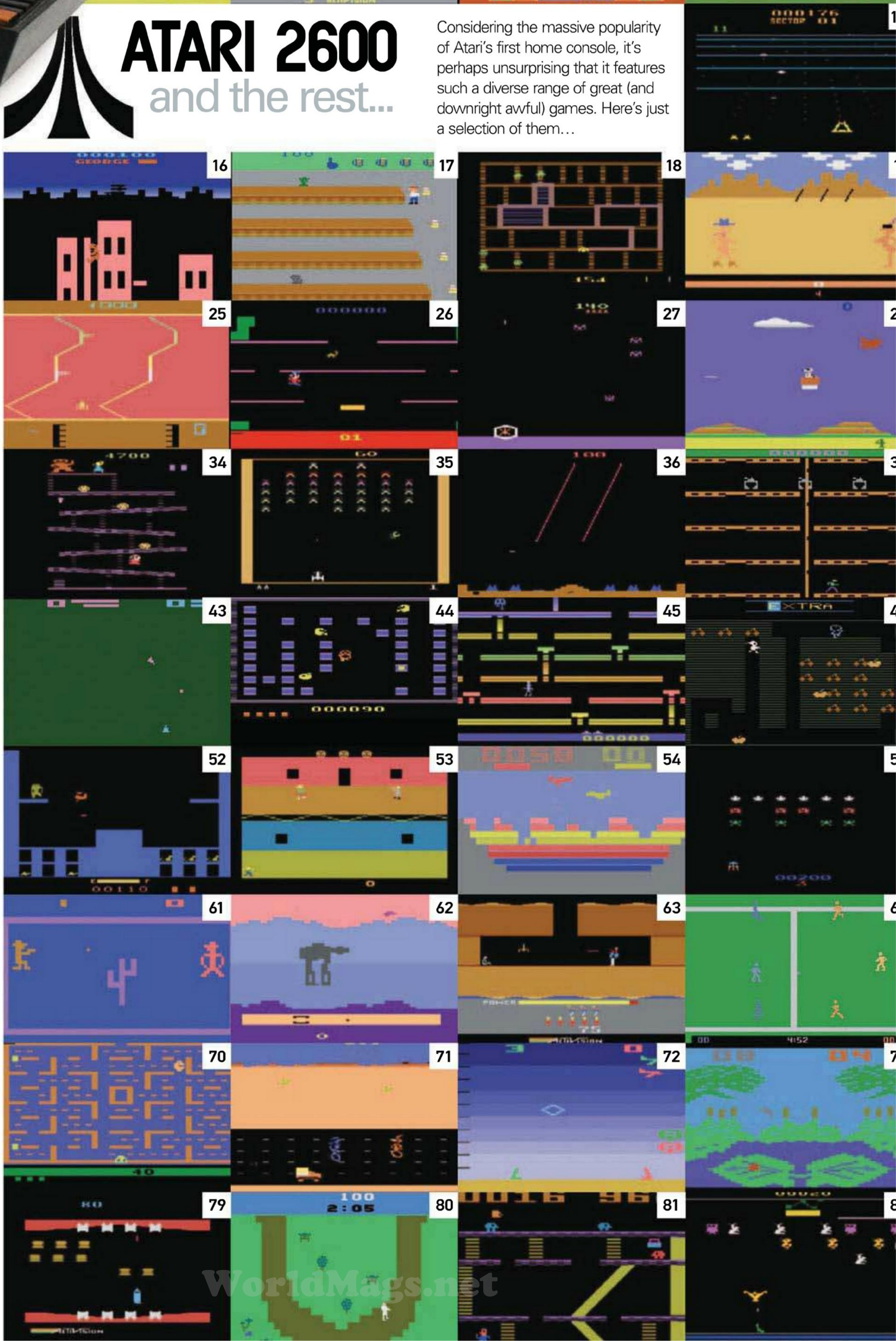




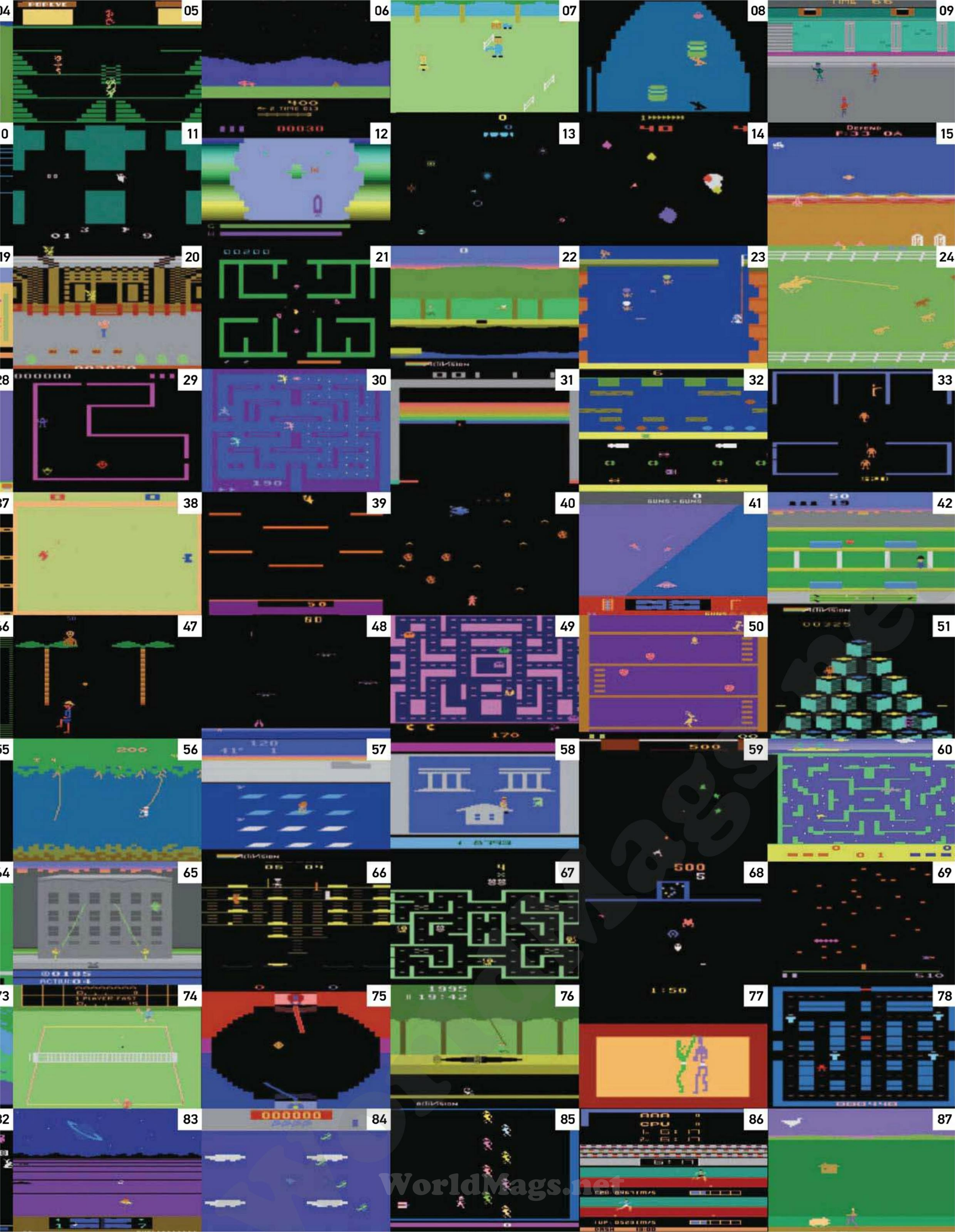
ATARI 2600

and the rest…

Considering the massive popularity of Atari's first home console, it's perhaps unsurprising that it features such a diverse range of great (and downright awful) games. Here's just a selection of them…



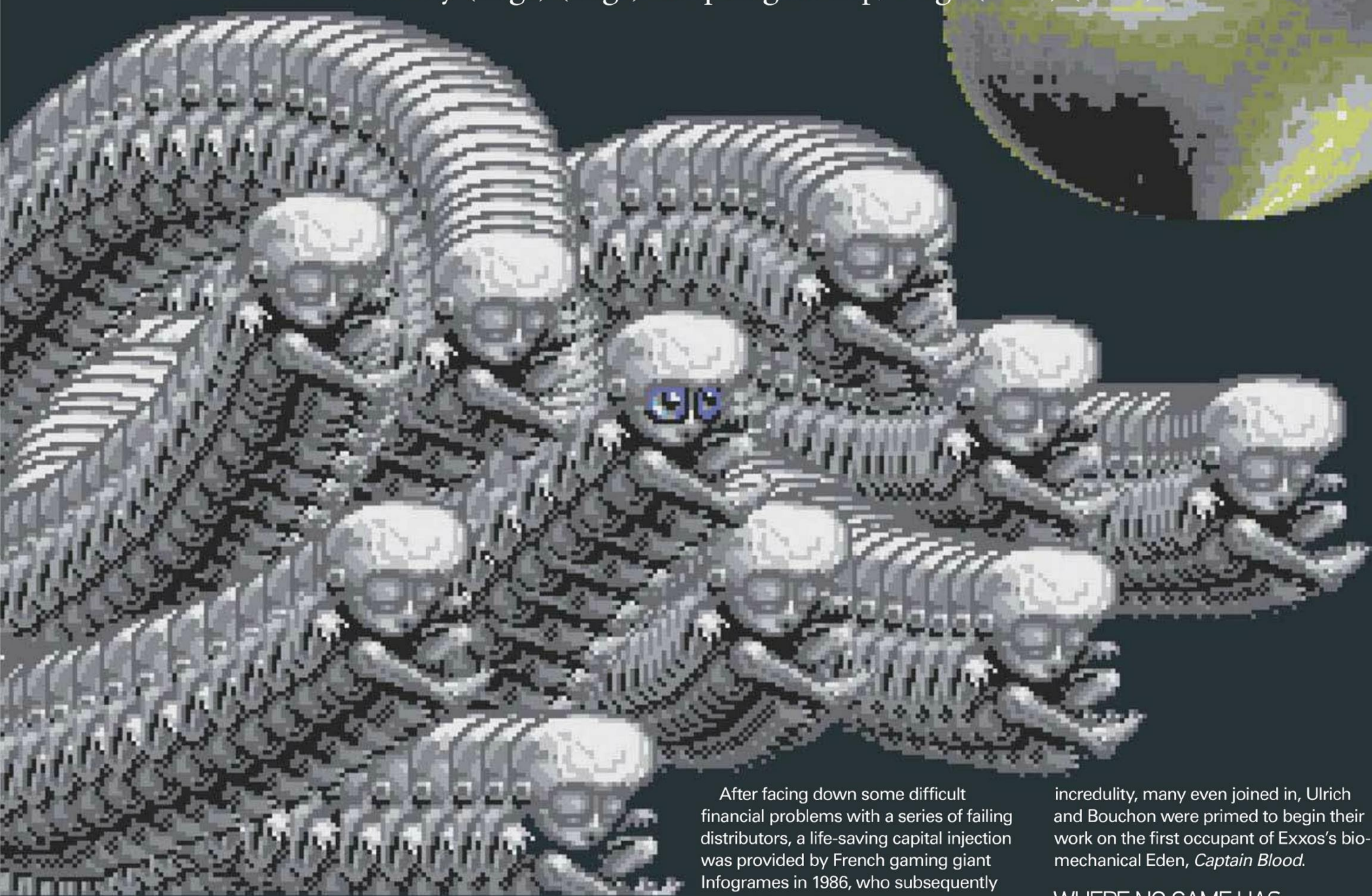
01 MINIATURE GOLF
02 RIVER RAID
03 EARTH DIES SCREAMING
04 GHOST MANOR
05 POPEYE
06 MOON PATROL
07 TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE
08 ZAXXON
09 DOUBLE DRAGON
10 BEAMRIDER
11 HAUNTED HOUSE
12 RIVER PATROL
13 GRAVITAR
14 ASTEROIDS
15 MEGA FORCE
16 RAMPAGE
17 TAPPER
18 AMIDAR
19 CUSTER'S REVENGE
20 GREMLINS
21 MARAUDER
22 PITFALL II: LOST CAVERNS
23 POOYAN
24 STAMPEDE
25 FANTASTIC VOYAGE
26 MARIO BROS
27 PHOENIX
28 SNOOPY AND THE RED BARON
29 VENTURE
30 ALIEN
31 BREAKOUT
32 FROGGER
33 BERZERK
34 DONKEY KONG
35 GALAXIAN
36 MISSILE COMMAND
37 ADVENTURES OF TRON
38 COMBAT
39 JOUST
40 PIGS IN SPACE
41 RADAR LOCK
42 KEYSTONE KAPERS
43 SPACE WAR
44 PENGO
45 INFILTRATE
46 MR. DO!
47 COCONUTS
48 DEMON ATTACK
49 MS. PAC-MAN
50 KANGAROO
51 Q*BERT
52 SKY SKIPPER
53 HALLOWEEN
54 CANYON BOMBER
55 GORF
56 JUNGLE HUNT
57 FROSTBITE
58 ET: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL
59 GYRUSS
60 SHARK ATTACK
61 OUTLAW
62 STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
63 H.E.R.O.
64 REALSPORTS SOCCER
65 GHOSTBUSTERS
66 BURGERTIME
67 MOUSE TRAP
68 SINISTAR
69 CENTIPEDE
70 PAC-MAN
71 ROAD RUNNER
72 AIR-SEA BATTLE
73 FROGS AND FLIES
74 REALSPORTS TENNIS
75 STAR WARS: JEDI ARENA
76 PITFALL!
77 KARATE
78 LOCK 'N' CHASE
79 PLAQUE ATTACK
80 CHUCK NORRIS SUPERKICKS
81 MINER 2049ER
82 CARNIVAL
83 SOLARIS
84 TIME PILOT
85 BACHELOR PARTY
86 TRACK & FIELD
87 FOREST


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THE CLASSIC GAME

CAPTAIN BLOOD

Howdy, you. You want play Blood (laugh) (laugh)? Blood great, you small (sob). I take you see Hydra Galaxy, give impossible information? Make big reproduction. You know what I say (laugh) (laugh). Teleport great ship, we go (friend) (friend)



Trust me – a few minutes at the UPCOM panel arguing about the co-ordinates of a planet where Small Yoko can go to get his freak on and that disjointed introduction above will make perfect sense. It's one of many such conversations you'll have in the surreal, grotesque and, at times, facetious universe of *Captain Blood*.

EXXOS: THE FRENCH GOD OF GAMES

An enigmatic and highly creative type, Philippe Ulrich's fascination with a computer's musical and entertainment possibilities prompted him to team up with Emmanuel Viau and found the first French games developer in 1981, ERE Informatique.

After facing down some difficult financial problems with a series of failing distributors, a life-saving capital injection was provided by French gaming giant Infogrames in 1986, who subsequently bought the entire company.

This allowed Ulrich the freedom to let his imagination run wild and begin working toward the hardcore sci-fi chronicles he was intent on creating. Bringing in Didier Bouchon – a like-minded artist who had done some design work on his earlier games – the two put their minds to delivering a dark fantasy epic for the Atari ST.

At a fittingly surreal press conference, Ulrich not only announced the new experimental gaming label within the Infogrames sphere, Exxos, but also his new religion dedicated to the worship of a god by the same name! He stood before a host of journalists and newsmen, urging them to repeatedly chant the phrase: "Ata ata hoglo hulu!" in praise of this new gaming deity. After a few moments of incredulity, many even joined in, Ulrich and Bouchon were primed to begin their work on the first occupant of Exxos's bio-mechanical Eden, *Captain Blood*.

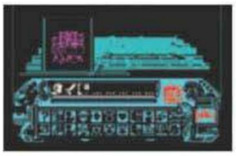
WHERE NO GAME HAS GONE BEFORE

The twisted, hallucinogenic and, it has to be said, often humorous story of *Captain Blood* is something of an illusory bastardisation of *Tron*, wherein a despondent computer programmer unwittingly becomes a malfunctioning



» The impressive (for the time) 3D flight sequence as an Oorxx bio-missile is piloted to the surface of a planet.

IN THE KNOW



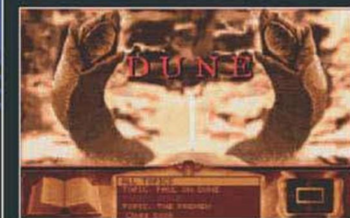
- » **PUBLISHER:** INFOGRAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** EXXOS
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** RPG
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



» As his condition worsens, Blood's hand spasms in response to his new technological nervous system; a wonderful, visual euphemism in lieu of a typical countdown as the time limit nears.

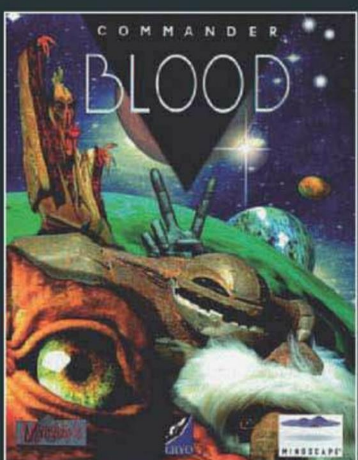


» A fantasy world like no other, and we have Exxos to thank.



» Exxos's development talent went on to form Cryo Interactive Entertainment and immediately wowed the industry with the hit adaptation of the Frank Herbert novel *Dune*.

"EACH SPECIES HAS THEIR OWN MODE OF SPEECH, MEANING BLOOD MUST ENDURE THE SELF-EFFACING PESSIMISM OF THE IZWAL AND THE DIPLOMATIC BUREAUCRACY OF THE BUGGOL"



» In 1994, an MS-DOS-only sequel was released called *Commander Blood*. Although it went mostly unnoticed, this is a serious overhaul to the original game and a valuable addition for ardent fans.

narration subroutine in the biological computer system of the real Captain Blood's space ship.

Blood has just begun a desperate quest to hunt down the last five 'Duplicates' (clones of the Captain) across the galaxy and recover his essential juices taken during the accidental cloning process. To keep him alive during the search, his ship (The Ark) gradually replaces his organs and functions with cybernetic devices. This adds to Blood's woes as he fights to regain his humanity before the lure of full, robotic replacement becomes too much.

The Ark is a massive living entity unable to physically land on any of the 32,768 planets in the vast Hydra Galaxy. To facilitate Blood's search, the Ark is able to give birth to Oorxx missiles. These living, biological machines have a number of uses, such as providing orbital reconnaissance of a planet's defence systems, teleportation of life forms and, most impressively of all, destruction of an entire planet.

Before an Oorxx can be put to effective use, however, Blood must manually fly the living missile over the planet's surface and through a tight canyon to the home of the inhabitant in an impressive 3D mini-game sequence. Once the Oorxx has located a life form, it lands and makes itself available as a comms relay or weapon of mass destruction, depending on requirements.

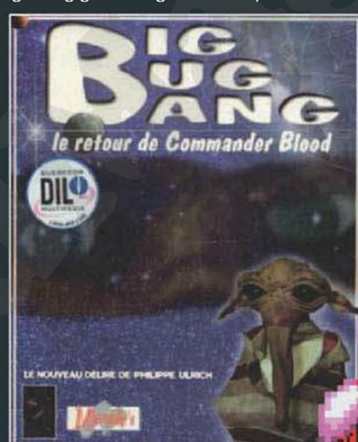
Since the galaxy is so mind-numbingly vast, jumping through hyperspace at random is a sure way for Blood to spend his last few hours of humanity in solitude. The game always begins at a populated planet, so coercing information from whichever creature the Oorxx locates is vital to the dreamlike quest. Keeping note of the locations of populated planets is a must for any space travellers, as is investigating any leads proffered by the weird and wonderful galactic inhabitants.

Interspecies interaction involves translating a series of UPCOM (Universal Protocol of Communication) symbols from a library of 150 different visual concepts, then replying in a similar manner. Each species also has their own mode of speech, meaning Blood must endure the self-effacing pessimism of the Izwal, the diplomatic bureaucracy of the Buggol and the underhanded belligerence of the Yukas.

Once a 'Number' (as the five clones are called) has been tracked down, Blood must dupe them into willingly transporting to his ship. When an alien is beamed on board, they're stored in cryogenic suspension as a security measure and placed in the fridgitorium. This storage device has a built-in cremation facility; if Blood should feel so inclined, the occupant of the fridgitorium can be instantly disintegrated. As well as providing an outlet for vengeance this is the method by which the stalwart Captain reclaims his fluids from the clones.

THE BIO GAME

Ulrich originally stated that Exxos was the beginnings of the 'bio-game', and while this imaginary genre may sound a little ambiguous, the term becomes eerily understandable after an hour's play, as *Captain Blood* really did find a whole new gaming genre single-handedly.



» The second sequel was even more obscure and unheard of than *Commander Blood*. *Big Bug Bang* was an MS-DOS game that only saw a French release. So sad (sob) (sob).

MEET BOB MORLOK

The Exxos label, despite only releasing three games, became revered for the extra contents of the game box. In *Captain Blood*'s case, it was the original novella *The Ark According To Captain Blood*.

This eccentric and comical story explains the bizarre conception of Captain Blood and the otherworldly journey of his obsessed progenitor, Bob Morlok. Absorbed into the diseased universe he created for a videogame, Bob becomes an aspect of Captain Blood's bio-consciousness. When a failed hyperspace jump clones 30 copies of the Captain, the mission begins to reclaim them and restore the vital fluids used to make the 'Duplicates' to the original Blood.

Along the way, Blood encounters a female Oorxx and his ship dissects its genes to install an on-board birth ramp for controllable bio-missiles Blood can use to explore the galaxy more efficiently. After 800 years of searching, only 5 'Numbers' remain, but they've been tipped off by a Migrax and hidden themselves away. This is where the novella ends and the player takes over Blood's nightmarish fate.





» Surrealist, sci-fi writer and game designer extraordinaire Philippe Ulrich.



THE MAKING OF...

PAPERBOY

When Paperboy rode in to arcades in 1984 he brought with him colourful cartoon visuals, a unique control method and fun gameplay. Darran Jones speaks to creators John Salwitz and Dave Ralston and finds out how they managed to create the ultimate busman's holiday



It's amazing what effect alcohol can have on you once it's swilling around your innards. Some people get an increased sense of confidence, while others suffer from a lack of judgement that sees them making decisions they would otherwise normally never consider. In the case of John Salwitz (currently senior development director at Electronic Arts) and Dave Ralston (a designer for Locomotive Games) the aforementioned alcohol consumption allowed them to overcome a stumbling block on one of the most popular games of 1984: Atari's *Paperboy.*

"Back in those days Atari was famous for having Beer Fridays," laughs Dave Ralston who, along with Will Noble, was *Paperboy*'s designer and lead artist. "We had a tapper there on the premises and one particular Friday there had been a party; when John and I came in the next day there was still plenty of beer in the keg. Anyway, we dragged it outside onto this atrium and did some brainstorming."

"I think that was the magic moment when everything clicked," agrees Salwitz, *Paperboy*'s lead programmer. "Dave had these wonderful storyboards that showed a projection of the entire street and we literally populated it that very day. We probably knocked out around 60-70 per cent of where all the characters in the game would finally end up."

"We were probably stupid for never doing that sooner," laughs Dave. The laughter continues throughout our 40-minute interview and it soon becomes obvious that the two friends both have a huge amount of respect for each other and the videogame that they brought kicking and screaming into the arcades after a 24-month gestation period. But where exactly did the original concept first come from?

"There had been a game that had just come out in the arcades called *Zaxxon* which had this really cool isometric perspective and it felt really fresh," recalls Ralston. "We saw it and realised that the isometric perspective would offer a very good view of the action in our game and that it would work far better than a side scroller or a top-down. As for the game itself, it grew out of the fact that there were five boys in my family and I was the last one and we were all paperboys, so I just took it from there. I think I was a really good paperboy. In fact, I seem to remember that I was a great paperboy," he continues. "The one thing I can remember about those days is driving around as a family and seeing newspapers on roofs and in bushes and stuff. Not everyone was a good paperboy in real life and I think that was at the heart of the idea. I just thought it would be an interesting twist for a game."

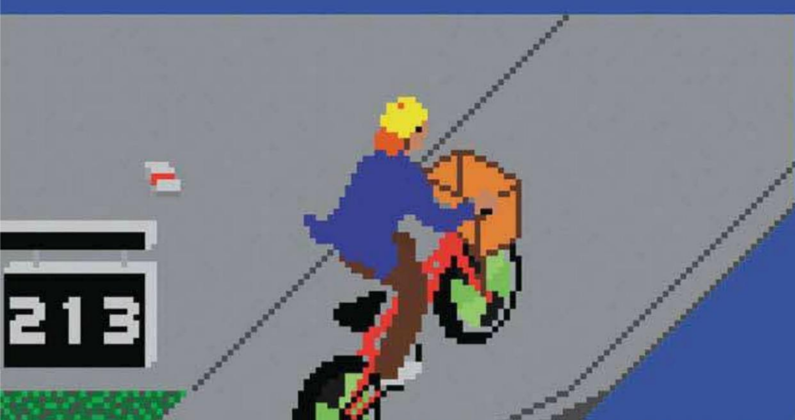
Interesting *Paperboy* most certainly was. Most games of the time saw you shooting down wave upon wave of vicious aliens, negotiating mazes or jumping across simplistic platforms; they certainly didn't allow you to participate in your part-time job.

Set over seven days, your task was to deliver papers to subscribers, while causing as much damage as possible to the homes of non-subscribers. Papers could be replenished en route and once you had completed your daily round, you could take part in a short but very exhilarating obstacle course. It may have sounded rather simplistic, but with each street being littered with obstacles, it took real skill to negotiate them, especially if you tackled 'Hard Way', *Paperboy*'s final street.

Paperboy may have been exciting and fresh back in the early Eighties, but those beautiful visuals, state-of-the-art controller and slick gameplay did come at a price: the aforementioned 24-month time period…



» As the week progressed, the obstacles got harder and harder to negotiate.





» While you scored points for breaking the windows of non-subscribers, care had to be taken not to hit any others.

JUST A BIT OF FUN

Don Traeger may have been instrumental to *Paperboy*'s final success, but that didn't mean that Ralston and the rest of the team liked to make things easy for him (all in the name of a good joke, you understand). "I remember that we made this bogus earnings report for him," recalls Ralston, which instantly jogs Salwitz's memory and sends him into guffaws of merriment.

"It was our first field test when you'd put the game out in an arcade, and I think Don must have gone on vacation right after it happened. Anyway, he went away for a whole week and while he was absent we got somebody in marketing (probably Jackie Sherman) to type up an earnings report so that it looked like all the others, except, of course, the earnings were horrible. It just showed that the game had absolutely tanked and then I just wrote across the front of it 'Project Cancelled'. We just left it on Don's desk and waited for him to come back from vacation. It was far from the truth as it actually tested very well."



IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI

» **DEVELOPERS:** JOHN SALWITZ
DAVE RALSTON

» **RELEASED:** 1984

» **GENRE:** ACTION

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £350+ (ORIGINAL CAB)



THE MAKING OF...
PAPERBOY



"It took two years, mainly due to some of the changes we had to make," explains Ralston. "It was pretty much everything really, from changes in the schematic style, to alterations to the controller. It took us a while to figure all those things out."

Fortunately, it wasn't all bad news, as one of the main differences – and for the two men, the most satisfying – was the change in hardware, which gave Salwitz, in particular, far more freedom than when the project had first started. "Originally *Paperboy* started off life as a low-resolution game (about 320 x 240 pixels) before Doug Snyder created the new medium-resolution System II board for it," begins Salwitz. Which explains why it looks very different to earlier games of the same period. "The hardware changed substantially and schematically, it basically went through a radical shift."

As well as having to deal with the change in hardware, the cost of the machines meant that the game had to be created as efficiently as possible, which in turn added to *Paperboy*'s development time. "That game is literally made up of little 8 x 8 blocks," continues Salwitz. "The backgrounds were painstakingly created one by one; it's a lot like building with bricks, except the bricks have already been painted. The animations and characters were built using some pretty primitive tools, and so due to the cost of putting all that together, we couldn't really do a lot of extra things and we were very deliberate when putting it all together."

Paperboy's conception may have been long and arduous, but one thing that did make a difference was the sheer amount of playtesting that the game went through. Over the course of its



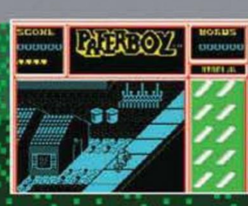


» Due to its arcade success, *Paperboy* appeared on a variety of home formats, so we've gathered a small selection here. (Above) C64, (below left to right) Amiga, Atari Lynx, Master System, Spectrum, Game Boy.



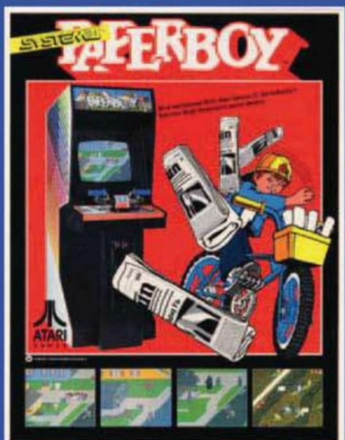








"WE DID HAVE A JOYSTICK ORIGINALLY, BUT WHEN WE FOCUSED THE GAME WITH [IT] IN PLACE, IT JUST DIDN'T GO DOWN WELL AT ALL. . . WE WANTED TO TRY SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE UNIQUE" DAVE RALSTON



» The original arcade flyer. Note the machine shot showing those famous handlebars.



two-year development time, *Paperboy* went through numerous focus groups and playtests before it was eventually released to a more than satisfied public.

When Atari had a new game in development it would simply take a prototype down to a local arcade, leave it in there for the day and judge its success on the amount of quarters that rolled in. It was a concept that wasn't lost on Salwitz and it also allowed one of the other key players in *Paperboy* to come to the foreground: marketing rep Don Traeger.

"Atari's playtesting process was the most beautiful test there was; it really doesn't get any better," gushes Salwitz. "We did a lot of focus group testing as well and that was where Don Traeger really started to get involved. In fact, Don is a very big part of the reason why *Paperboy* ever got finished, because he was not only the original marketing partner on it, but he also came in at a point in the game where we were really struggling.

"We'd just had this really horrific focus group, and it was just heartbreaking and frustrating for the team because we really cared about the product we had created. So anyway, he came in, ran that focus group, came out and everyone – I mean everyone – was saying horrible things about the game. Afterwards he comes out with this really big smile and says, 'That was great, we learned a lot from that.' After that he proceeded to help us really understand what was going on."

Traeger played another important role in *Paperboy*: that of the actual Paperboy himself. Asking about the origins of *Paperboy*'s speech brought many a laugh from Ralston until he admitted that the main character's voice belonged to none other than Traeger, who's now CEO of Locomotive Games. But how does being the voice of a videogame character stack up to being a CEO? "To this day he takes a lot of pride in the fact that he was the voice of the Paperboy and people still remember him for that," laughs Ralston. "It was no actor we used; it was just the marketing guy."

While Traeger started taking control of *Paperboy*'s focus groups, Ralston and Salwitz quickly found out that one of the easiest ways of getting feedback for the game was to simply carry on working on it. "One of the other key ways that you did testing at Atari was that if anyone was going to walk over to your lab or cubicle you would just let them play the game, which is amazingly dissimilar to the way things happen these days," says Salwitz. "There was just so much casual play from other people in the building that I think it was one of the best ways that you could ever understand what really did and didn't work. You could tell when your game was good because people were coming over at lunch and plenty of other times and were literally interrupting your work just so they could have one more go. We'd just sit there and watch them play."

While plenty of playtesting ensured that *Paperboy* was a hit with its target audience once it was eventually released, there were still plenty of other problems that the team needed to solve. While the most recognisable aspect of the arcade machine is the shining chrome handlebars that adorn the front of it, they weren't in place at the beginning of *Paperboy*'s conception. "We did have a joystick originally," begins Ralston, "but when we focused the game with the joystick in place, it just didn't go down well at all."

"I think the joystick was confusing at the time because of the perspective that we were using," he continues. "We had always had something at the back of our minds that we wanted to try something a little more unique and the joystick feedback that we received kind of confirmed that." Leaving the joystick idea behind, Salwitz and Ralston left the unique control mechanism – "It was basically a *Star Wars* flight controller that was just modified for *Paperboy*" – in the more than capable hands of Milt Loper.

"Atari at that time had a very active mechanical shop," begins Salwitz, when we ask him about the creation of those iconic handlebars. "It was amazing; those guys could pretty much build anything and it was part of Dave's philosophy that we should always try and innovate in all things. In the end we decided that the controls were just another area that we had a chance to innovate in. You also



» Get hit by a car and you certainly knew about it.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

720°
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1986

KLAX
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1989

RAMPART (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1990



CONVERSION CAPERS

With the arcade game proving to be so popular, *Paperboy* quickly started appearing on various home consoles and computers. Indeed, it was recently released on the 360's Xbox Live Arcade, but neither Ralston nor Salwitz have had a chance to play it yet.

"I remember the NES version, for me at least, being a huge surprise," recalls Salwitz. "Right after we did *Paperboy*, we dove into *720°* and right after that it was *Cyberball* and right after that it was *Rampart* – we were just so focused on our own work. We never thought about how we could continue marketing a product, we were all about what can we do next, and it always had to be completely different. If I'm truthful we were coin-op purists and for us, coin-op hardware was so much more powerful than anything that was in the home. So I think the real truth is that we probably looked down our noses at anything that wasn't coin-op at the time, purely because of the difference in hardware and what you could do with it. At the time I don't think we understood the potential of home sales – this was Atari after all – and we had just got through the VCS nightmares and so we didn't really have an appreciation of what Nintendo was doing at the time at all until it really took off."





have to keep in mind that back in the early Eighties, we didn't know for sure that even the joystick would become a foundation for control, or the trackball for that matter. We just saw them as kind of stepping stones to other controls. In the end it turned out that the handlebars themselves made for the most natural way of playing *Paperboy*. We never tried to create them as a way of simply increasing sales; it has always been about what was best for the actual game."

With *Paperboy*'s control system now decided, one other factor had to be taken into consideration: namely, would the chrome handlebars be strong enough to withstand the vigorous assault of the average arcade-goer?

"There was a guy at Atari called Dave Stubben," begins Ralston, which immediately causes Salwitz to burst into fits of laughter. "He was one of the senior execs at Atari games, and he was a very big, very strong guy. And in all the controls that we used there was always this thing called the 'Stubben rule'. Basically, if the controller could survive Dave then it was going to be okay. So obviously with this controller, this piece of chrome steel that was bolted onto the front of the machine had to be really resistant to leverage and anything else you could think of."

While the final handlebars eventually passed the test with flying colours, Salwitz recalls an earlier prototype that didn't fare quite so well… "The funniest story I remember is that Mark Cerny came into the lab one day and we had just gotten this brand-new controller in that we were very excited about it. So anyway, I looked at Mark and told him, 'You just watch, it's going to survive and everything.' He basically looked me straight in the eye and said, 'No it won't.' He then decided to give the thing a massive twist to see if he was right and it practically came off in his hands. It didn't survive him at all and Mark's not a big guy, so that particular incarnation never even got close to the rule."

Eventually the handlebars were in place, and they helped to give *Paperboy* a thoroughly different experience to all the other videogames that were around at the



time. Once you gripped those handlebars in both hands, you were ready to set off on your delivery route through suburban America. With its brightly coloured houses, traditional mail boxes and copious amounts of speech, you could almost imagine that you were actually riding down a sidewalk and delivering papers. To further add to the realism, Salwitz and Ralston ensured that the majority of obstacles you encountered also added to the authenticity. Therefore, dangerous dogs would chase you up the street, huge cars would zip across each road's junctions, and there were even remote-controlled cars and self-aware lawn mowers to avoid. While the hazards would get stranger the further you progressed, they were nothing like the obstacles that Salwitz and Ralston had originally intended to use…

"Initially, we wanted *Paperboy* to have a really surreal feel to it," explains Salwitz. "We went pretty crazy for a while and the focus groups that saw it just didn't get it," remembers Ralston. "We had things like speedboats going down the middle of the street, runaway pianos, giant snails at the various junctions and even ducks in business suits that would walk up and down the sidewalk. Just really bizarre stuff like that," he chuckles. "The actual perspective was the same, the look of the art style was the same, and it was just all these wacky characters that weren't received very well."

"For some reason when people rode down the street they just didn't expect to see them," continues Salwitz. "Which is strange," interjects Ralston who, like Salwitz, is once again fighting back laughter. "I see these things all the time."

Ralston may well be used to seeing the grim reaper and unicycle-riding punks whenever he goes for a Sunday drive, but one thing that is noticeably absent from *Paperboy* is the ability to play as a girl. As Salwitz explains, the absence of a female delivery girl was down to memory restrictions and not for any other reason.

"Physically, our ability to put more than one character into that hardware would have been very expensive at the time," he tells us. "The system constraints just stopped you from doing a lot of things and you were literally counting every byte you were putting into things. The central character of the game used an enormous amount of memory, particularly graphics memory (EEPROM) so the storage of that would have been very prohibitive. So we were really stuck with a single character no matter what we did. As for the choice between whether it should have been a paperboy or a papergirl, you just kind of go with the thing that's the most obvious, except of course for the giant snails and all those other things… I'm sure we talked about it at the time, but there would have been no practical way for us to get more than one character in the original game."

With the thought of what didn't make it into the game still fresh in their minds, we are keen to ask the pair what other aspects of *Paperboy* ended up on the cutting room floor. "Well, I remember just how much trouble we went to in trying to give the Paperboy a throwing animation," muses Ralston. "In the end, though, it was proving to be such a nightmare we just decided that he shoots them out of his head."

Other missing features included proper physics and motion that would see newspapers bounce off walls or get caught in hedges; a larger obstacle course, which at one stage was even going to be the basis for a sequel; and the ability to ride down the other side of the street. "I particularly liked this one," admits Ralston, "and we talked about how we would implement it for ages. We initially talked about going down the other side of the street and having it go in the reverse direction and bringing more traffic into play, but then we would have had the safety commission coming down on us even more."

Despite numerous playtests, stressful focus groups and snapped handlebars, *Paperboy* was a huge success for Atari and remains a beloved classic to many gamers. With the benefit of 23 years of hindsight, we are eager to know what changes Salwitz and Ralston would have made to the game if they'd had the time and opportunity. "One thing we did think about at the time was to ship *Paperboy* as a serialised game," reveals Salwitz. "At the time everything in arcades was based on how much replay you would get out of it, so we did once consider shipping out just Easy Street and then releasing the other two roads three to six months later. I think if we'd gone with this serialised release we would have sold more units."

"Man, that's greed, pure greed," laughs Ralston. "If I was to return to *Paperboy* today the only element I can think of expanding would be the whole BMX biking side of the game and maybe working a trick-based scoring system into it. You could have style points for throwing papers while in a jump, or doing a flip or whatever. I think that would have worked really well…"

While Ralston muses about his super-athletic Paperboy, we ask Salwitz why he thinks their creation remains so enjoyable to so many gamers. "We had a wonderful team," he concludes, "and the people involved are still my very dear friends. We had a really good time working together, and to be able to work with four or five people and have each of them focused on a completely different part of the game and still be able to talk about it afterwards is a really rare and wonderful experience. I feel *Paperboy* was successful because the team was successful."

"OUR ABILITY TO PUT MORE THAN ONE CHARACTER INTO THAT HARDWARE WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY EXPENSIVE AT THE TIME… YOU WERE LITERALLY COUNTING EVERY BYTE" JOHN SALWITZ



» At the beginning of each day you'd be immediately told how many subscribers you had left.



» As a reward after finishing your paper round, you got to ride along an obstacle course.





» Mindscape's sequel was so bad, this is the only mention we're going to give it. The N64 version wasn't much better.



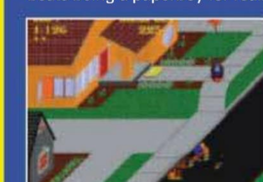
» Successfully finishing the obstacle course saw you being treated with a pleasant congratulations screen.

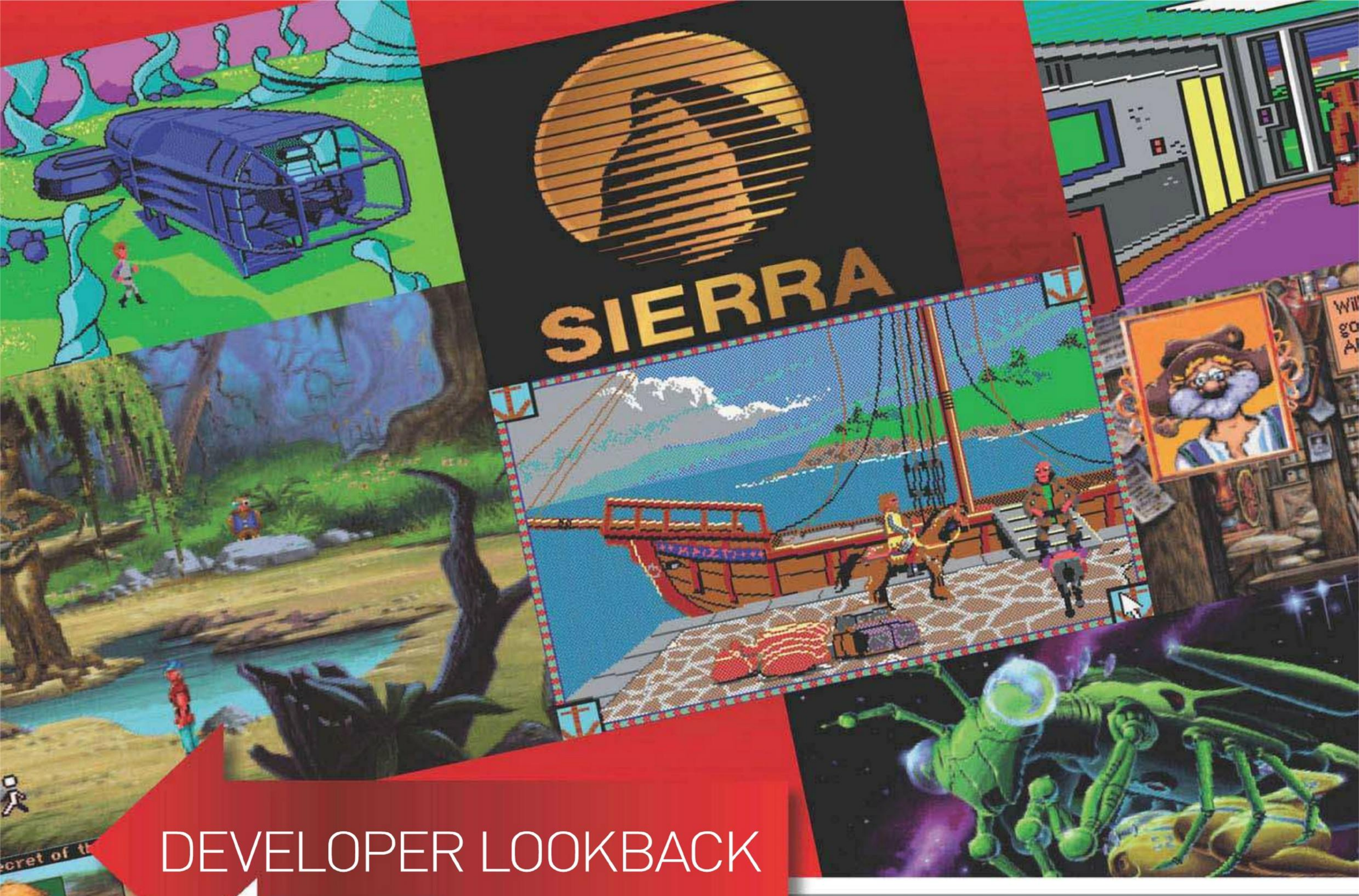
23 YEARS ON

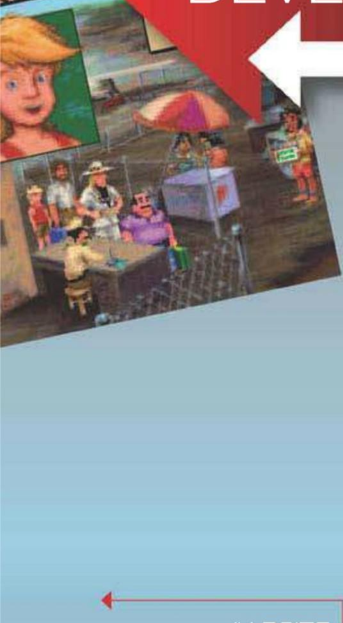
Amazingly, Atari's *Paperboy* is still wowing gamers, and it's on Microsoft's 360 of all things. Converted by Digital Eclipse, the Xbox Live version of *Paperboy* features online leader boards, a variety of achievements (some of which are incredibly hard to earn) and an assortment of online two-player games.

Sadly, while the game is as enjoyable as ever – although if we're brutally honest, the 360's D-pad isn't a match for the arcade machine's handlebars – taking the title online wasn't perhaps the smartest move that Digital Eclipse has ever made, mainly because it's just so damned laggy.

Still, it's certainly not bad for 400 points (around £3.50) and while an updated look would have been nice, it certainly beats being a paperboy for real.







DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

SIERRA ON-LINE

ADVENTURE GAMING LEGENDS SIERRA MADE THE JUMP FROM MERELY DESCRIBING WHERE YOU WERE, TO ACTUALLY PUTTING YOU THERE AND LETTING YOU EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF. CRAIG RITCHIE INVESTIGATES HOW THE MEANING OF 'LOOK' CHANGED FROM 'WHERE AM I?' TO 'TELL ME ABOUT WHAT I SEE'

IN BRIEF

Sierra originated in 1979 when young husband and wife team Ken and Roberta Williams set out to create their own adventure games from home. Over the following years the company went on to release arguably the most ground-breaking adventure games of all time, and continually pushed the envelope in terms of technological innovation and player immersion. Their popularity lasted almost two decades, and the loyal fan base, which survives to this day, highlights the immense impact that Sierra has had on people's lives.

It's a funny thing, circumstance. As the old adage goes, nothing is certain except death and taxes. And sure enough, if it weren't for the joy of tax returns, chances are we would never have seen Sierra's legendary *Quest* games. Way back in 1979, while remotely coding an income tax program on a mainframe computer located on the other side of America, a young Ken Williams stumbled upon a file named 'Adventure'. He ran the application, and found himself standing at the end of a road facing the most legendary brick house in adventure gaming history. He called his wife Roberta to have a look, and after a bit of fiddling around the two became hooked. Ken's coding took a back seat for the next three weeks until they'd finished the game, at which time Roberta became adamant that she wanted to make her own interactive adventures. After many hours planning and designing at the kitchen table, On-Line Systems was born.

With his programming skills and her imagination, the couple set about creating what was to be the first ever graphical adventure game, *Mystery House*. Sporting basic monochrome line drawings to accompany the text, the game's parser allowed players to enter simple commands of one or two words. Released in 1980 for the Apple II, *Mystery House* went on to sell more than 10,000 copies, an outstanding feat considering that at the time there really was no established home software market to speak of.

Encouraged by *Mystery House*'s popularity, Ken and Roberta went on to produce a number of adventure and action titles under the banners of SierraVenture and SierraVision, and in mid-1982 changed their title to Sierra On-Line – a name that would soon become synonymous with adventure gaming. The limitations of the hardware at the time, though, meant that while Sierra had the innovation



of graphics, its games sometimes felt as though they lacked the depth of some of their competitor's releases. Yet this was no reflection of Roberta's creativity – in fact, her games were stretching the Apple II as far as it could go, and still she was left with an end result that paled next to her initial concepts.

The Williams knew that Sierra needed a computer system that could faithfully realise Roberta's ambitious designs. Thankfully for them, and for the gaming public, that is exactly what happened. While Sierra was finding its feet in an industry that had yet to find its own, its greatest boon came in the form of a relationship with another company looking after its own interests. IBM was devising a way to promote its new home system, the PCjr, and felt that this could best be achieved through the development of a game, which would fully show off its capabilities.

And so it was in 1983, after a reported $700,000 funding by IBM, that Sierra On-Line developed a ground-breaking engine for graphical adventure games. Called AGI (quite simply, Adventure Game Interpreter), it allowed characters to move freely around the background, with prioritised horizontal 'bands' giving the illusion of depth (if the player were above band 3, for example, then they would appear behind any objects in band 1 or 2). As is the case with so many gaming milestones, this amazingly simple innovation proved revolutionary, and the first animated '3D' adventure game was released – the legendary *King's Quest*.

Never before had gamers experienced such freedom of movement and character control. *King's Quest* had screen after screen of graphically detailed locations in which the player could roam around and try different actions on different objects. The game's vocabulary was so extensive that it was possible to do – or attempt to do – nearly anything one could imagine.

King's Quest's runaway success saw Sierra On-Line hire developers to work on more titles using the same engine (or, rather, interpreter), resulting in some of the most popular adventure gaming franchises of all time: *Space Quest*, *Police Quest*, and of course *Leisure Suit Larry*.

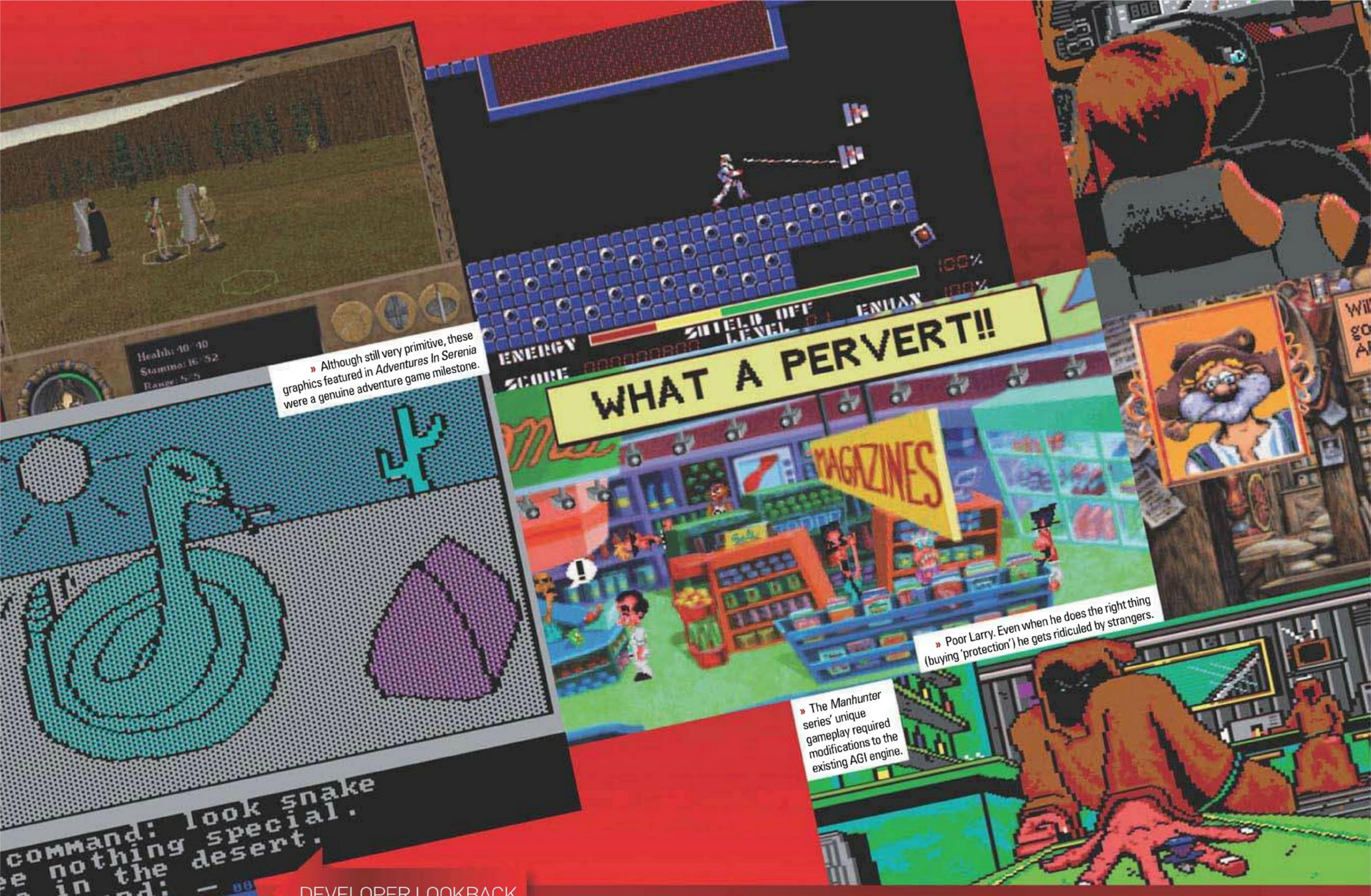
It seemed that Sierra could do no wrong, and for much of the Eighties and early Nineties the PC was the domain of the graphical adventure game. *Leisure Suit Larry* creator and Sierra legend Al Lowe gives us his insight into this phenomenon: "Adventure games were perfect for the Eighties, especially the early Eighties when you had to be a geek just to own a PC, let alone boot it up and get anything to run on it! As using DOS meant managing config.sys and autoexec.bat files, it took a puzzle-solver comfortable with command lines and used to spelling correctly just to run the computer. There was no spell check back then – PCs were totally unforgiving. All these things were perfect for our adventure games, which I guess were just perfect for the market at the time."

As popularity spread, often by word of mouth, the freedom to explore and immerse oneself in Sierra's extensive electronic environments touched the lives of computer

FRUSTRATING DEPTHS

One of the most trying aspects of the old *Quest* games was that the player could often find themselves lacking a particular item that was no longer accessible. You definitely didn't want to find yourself aboard the ship in *Gold Rush!* without having bought any citrus fruit, for example, or you would soon find yourself suffering from an unavoidable bout of scurvy… While frustrating on the one hand, what this also meant is that Sierra's games were given more depth and considerably longer completion times, as players explored every inch of every screen for less obvious items, knowing that rushing through anything could lead to impasse hours down the line. This additional exploration factor inevitably led to the player reading more dialogue boxes, interacting with more of the scenery, and hence having the experience of a larger and more engaging world.

"AND SO IT WAS THAT IN 1983, AFTER A REPORTED $700,000 FUNDING BY IBM, SIERRA ON-LINE DEVELOPED A GROUND-BREAKING ENGINE FOR GRAPHICAL ADVENTURE GAMES"



» Although still very primitive, these graphics featured in *Adventures In Serenia* were a genuine adventure game milestone.

» Poor Larry. Even when he does the right thing (buying 'protection') he gets ridiculed by strangers.

» The *Manhunter* series' unique gameplay required modifications to the existing AGI engine.



gamers the world over. "Once, I met this guy from Russia," says Lowe. "He was a computer consultant over there just when the Soviet Union was breaking up. He told me how every computer he'd ever been on in Russia had a Sierra directory with a *LSL* sub-directory. He said he'd never looked at a Hard Drive that didn't have it – it was like it was actually a part of DOS!" Then he laughs, adding: "I guess we only sold one copy to the whole of Russia though!"

Still, successful sales in the USA and abroad naturally led to company and employee growth. "It was pretty much any time you found somebody who was willing to work there, we grabbed them," adds Lowe. "Ken was a big racquetball player. He met a guy at the gym playing racquetball who was a retired Californian Highway Patrol officer, and he started telling Ken stories. Ken basically said you've got a hell of a lot of cool stories – want to make a game? And that's how Jim Walls got started on *Police Quest*."

Due to their remote location in the forests of Oakhurst, California, Sierra also began outsourcing its games to programmers who would work remotely. In a forward-thinking move well ahead of the now familiar notion of the home-office, Sierra displayed a knack for locating and recruiting talent wherever it was based. "Al Lowe worked out of his home for the most part for *Leisure Suit Larry*," says Dave Murray, one of the creators of Sierra's celebrated *Manhunter* titles, "while Jim Walls worked on *Police Quest* in a guest house on Ken Williams' property. The guys that did *Gold Rush!* lived in a trailer in the Sierra parking lot!"

The Murrays, too, developed their games from home. "We flew to Sierra during the last two weeks of development so that we could interact with the play-testers, help with inserting music into the game and with conversions to Apple and other computers. We had all the support that we asked for and it was a friendly place to work."

In 1988, Sierra upped the ante once more and released noteworthy sequels *King's Quest IV*, *Police Quest II* and *Leisure Suit Larry II* – the first games to make use of its new engine, SCI (Sierra's Creative Interpreter). While basic mouse control and a pop-up input box added to the functionality, it was the inclusion of synthesized sound and a significant improvement to the graphics (SCI doubled AGI's horizontal resolution) that marked the major steps that Sierra had taken with its new interpreter.

"AGI was a simple game engine tailored primarily to adventure games," explains Brian Provinciano, developer of the freely downloadable 'make-your-own-Sierra-game' package SCI Studio. "SCI was, on the other hand, designed to be much more complex and versatile to no specific type of game. In fact, the majority of the adventure game aspects of SCI games were written not in the engine, but in the scripts. By doing it this way, they could ensure the games ran exactly the same on all platforms. SCI was designed more as a portable virtual machine with graphical and sound capabilities rather than a simple adventure game engine. It was way ahead of its time – an object-oriented virtual machine years before Java."

Later incarnations of SCI saw the elimination of typing altogether as Sierra embraced a more Lucasarts-esque method of icon driven mouse input, entering the VGA era with the 1990 release of *King's Quest V*, Sierra's first 256-colour game. Although developers such as Origin were already stretching PC hardware to the limits to show off just what was possible, Sierra seemed specifically focused on using new hardware – particularly the storage capacity of CD-ROMs – to develop ways to further engross players into

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

While today's PC and videogames may have near uniformity in terms of packaging and contents (read: one DVD and a simple manual), back in the Eighties and Nineties it was standard fare to include all manner of books, maps and other paraphernalia in the box. Sierra, being no exception, produced some very memorable packages. The gaming experience was thus significantly enhanced through all of these extras by offering back story for additional depth, helping the player along via tips and clues, or simply acting as copy protection (*King's Quest III*, for example, was impossible to finish without knowing the spells in the manual). Some items, such as the cut-out masks in *Space Quest III* or the pencil and notebook in *The Colonel's Bequest* have now become collector's essentials.



» *The Black Cauldron*, aimed at younger players, was a great result of Sierra's good relationship with Disney.

» As part of his quest for the Holy Grail, King Arthur had to free Sir Lancelot from the Lady of the Lake's icy prison.

» Ah, love… Prince Alexander, like his father King Graham, put himself through some serious trials to find his bit of all right.



its game worlds. Creating ever-more detailed and colourful environments, rich musical scores, and even professionally voiced speech were all par for the course in Sierra's own quest for greater player immersion.

"At the time we didn't know we were doing anything earth-shattering," admits Lowe. "We were primarily making games we wanted to play. We enjoyed it, and it really wasn't until I built a website and started getting emails from fans that I realised how many people played those games and enjoyed them. Sure, I got spreadsheets every month of how many copies had been sold. But that's a number on a line in a box, you know? I never put together the fact that every one of those copies was somebody trying to solve those puzzles we created. Once I retired and started allowe.com I got tens of thousands of emails. I answered every one of them, not only from people who had a lot of fun but also really touching ones from people who said I'd changed their life because through playing *Larry* they then got into programming. Only then I realised that we were in a special place at a special time, and that was due to our isolation. It was partly due to the fact that it wasn't down the street from another game company, where we could go down there to solve problems and ask them how they do things. No, we were just kind of pioneers out in the forest. We didn't have a clue what influence we had."

Sierra's great success would continue through to the mid-Nineties with a slew of well-received sequels and original titles, as well as some hugely popular VGA remakes of their older AGI adventures. In 1994, business was booming and Sierra's head office was moved from its sleepy roots in Oakhurst, California to the hustle and bustle of Bellevue, Washington. On top of this, Sierra had been publishing titles from Japanese developer Game Arts (most notably *Thexder* and *Silpheed*) and had acquired Jeff Tunnell's Dynamix, an excellent development house responsible for such hits as *Red Baron*, *Rise Of The Dragon* and *The Incredible Machine*. It was all growth, growth, growth.

Sierra's story was truly a classic tale, from a young couple's dream in the late Seventies to a multi-million dollar success story a decade and a half later. But the sad truth was that the dream scenario would soon come to an end as Sierra's continuing expansion and market prominence attracted the big money men and the chaos that invariably follows once motivation switches from creativity to greed.

Sierra's demise began in 1996 when the company was purchased by CUC International, thus taking its first steps into the corporate world. Ken Williams had to relinquish executive control over his 17-year project, and things went downhill soon after. Entire divisions were stripped of staff or shut down altogether, resulting in hundreds of employees being laid off as the new management focused solely on impressing shareholders. There appeared to be little to no concern about the games (or the human beings) that had got Sierra there in the first place. It was a terrible time, a horrific dream-turned-nightmare, as Williams could do nothing but watch as Sierra

"SIERRA'S GREAT SUCCESS WOULD CONTINUE THROUGH TO THE MID-NINETIES WITH A SLEW OF WELL-RECEIVED SEQUELS AND ORIGINAL TITLES"

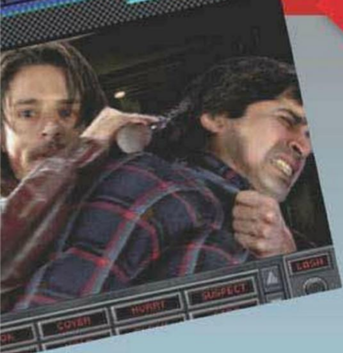


» *The Colonel's Bequest* played out over a number of Acts, prompted along by the player's actions. If you saw this clock, you know you'd done something right.

» Jane Jensen's macabre voodoo-themed title, *Gabriel Knight*, was one of Sierra's most challenging titles. Al Lowe admits having to phone Jensen after a few days because he didn't have a clue what to do.

» *King's Quest I*: This is where it all began...

» Were you sure to walk all the way round the car before Sonny Bonds hit the streets?



was stripped of any hint of its former glory. Big business was in full swing, mergers and acquisitions were in abundance, and it was not long before CUC International added the ultimate insult to the already catastrophic injuries: it was responsible for one of the largest cases of accounting fraud in American history. Stock values plummeted, high-level executives were tried and imprisoned, and even more people lost their jobs. Sierra and its hundreds of employees were hopelessly caught up in the middle.

In late 1998 Sierra was sold to Havas, a French company who then sold it to the Vivendi conglomerate soon after. By now nearly all of the original creative teams were either fired, dissolved or had already moved on to better things. The new Sierra released a few more sequels to its popular franchises, but fans generally agreed that these games were rushed jobs, which showed little passion on behalf of the developers. By this time, the industry's attention had shifted to consoles and 3D gaming, and with a marked decrease in both the quality and quantity of Sierra's titles, fans had to face the reality that the adventure game's Golden Age was over.

Things just got worse over the following months, culminating on 22 February 1999, a day that would come to be referred to as 'Chainsaw Monday': Sierra's executive management made the radical decision to close the original studios in Oakhurst.

Over 250 employees lost their jobs, people's lives were thrown into shambles, and Sierra's soul was truly lost in a maelstrom of corporate disarray. The next few years were nothing more than a string of layoffs and closures until, in 2004, the last bastion of the old Sierra fell with the closure of the Bellevue offices. Sierra, in all but name, had died.

"Vivendi owns the word Sierra and the brand and all the assets of the company," says a noticeably more sombre Lowe, "but as for the employees, they have all scattered to the winds. With software companies, it's all about the intellectual properly, the creative ownership – the intelligence. When you take away all those people, all you've got is the word 'Sierra' and the words 'Leisure Suit Larry'. You can try making it into a good game, but it won't work – not even if you try your hardest, not even if you spend millions of dollars. *Magna Cum Laude* proved that. That's because all the original people are gone. The company went into a death spiral when everybody left. With the accounting irregularities, then the selling of the name, it was just a terrible mess. As for a real company of people answering phones by saying 'Hi, we are Sierra,' that stopped on 27 August 2004."

Fast forward now to the present day. The Sierra we knew and loved is little more than a memory, immortalised by the numerous fan-sites that dot the web. Dedicated programmers have developed software studios that enable anyone to make their own AGI or SCI games. There are a handful of completed homebrew games available for free download, and a good number of these show great dedication and talent. Some serious effort has been put into excellent, professional quality remakes (see 'Remakes' boxout). Each of these labours of love stands testament to the phenomenal impact that Sierra's games have had on their fans.

"I think people that have played classic Sierra games and really gotten into them have always had ideas in the back of their minds about their spin on a certain game, or their idea of a new kind of hero," says Eric Fullerton, maintainer of AGI Studio. "Offering something like AGI Studio to someone like that is a dream come true." And the great thing is that a number of these homemade games are actually rather good. "I've played a lot of AGI games and tested quite a few," continues Fullerton, "and I'll say my top favourites are

AL LOWE ON SERIOUS FANS

"The craziest fan mail I ever got was a parcel about two by three feet wide and an inch thick. I opened it up and it contained dozens of pieces of cardboard cutouts. This guy had coloured each one in with crayons to create the characters he wanted in the game. He had written up a whole storyline and had big pieces of coloured cardboard making up the background for each screen. You then had to move these people around according to the story. That was probably the weirdest thing I've ever received."



» *The Dagger Of Amon Ra*. Perfect for those gamers who like their adventuring to have an Egyptian twist

» The board game *Jones In The Fast Lane* was one of a number of excellent non-adventure titles released by Sierra.

» *Larry 5* saw players alternate between controlling Leisure Suit Larry and Passionate Patti.

Thanks to Al Lowe, Dave Murray, Brian Provinciano and Eric Fullerton for their input and contributions to this story. The full transcript of Ken Williams' letter can be read at Josh Lulewicz's excellent www.vintage-sierra.com. With thanks to Mobygames.com for several images

Space Quest: The Lost Chapter, *Time Quest*, *V: The Graphic Adventure* and *URI Quest*. These are all really wonderfully polished games and they truly belong in the Sierra family."

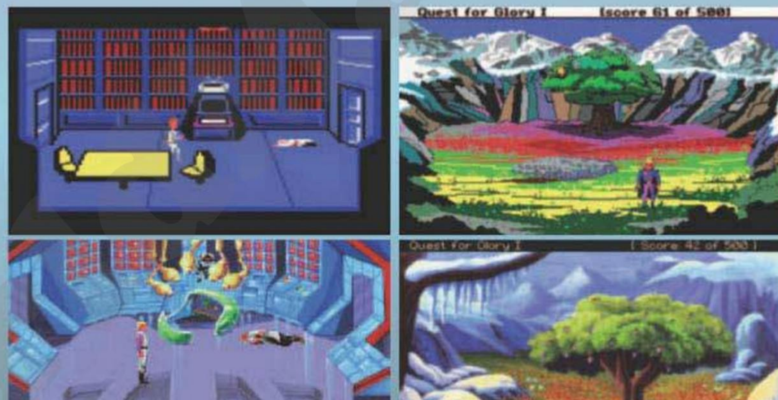
Sierra has touched lives – more so than any other games developer of its time, and it is the soul of the original company, from the early days around the kitchen table to the last true adventures of the mid-Nineties, which the fans remember. Sierra's impact on the world of gaming, and in fact its entire legacy, can best be summed up by Ken Williams himself, in an extract from a letter written to former employees after the extensive layoffs that came about after 'Chainsaw Monday':

"I console myself in the following way, and perhaps it will help you to cope with what has occurred. Let's imagine that a stranger had walked up to any of us on the street in 1979, and said: 'Would you like to move to one of the greatest cities on Earth? While you are there, you can play a key role in creating a company that just about everyone will know and respect. Your grandchildren will be amazed when they learn that you once worked there. You will be the envy of your peers, because they will know that your team created the largest collection of hits ever to come from one company. There will even be years when you will have played a role in over half the products on the industry's top ten lists! You will be surrounded by incredibly intelligent, hard-working people, who will work 20+ hours per day when it takes it to get the job done. And, you will have more fun than you ever thought possible. There's only one catch, though. This will only last for 20 years.' Even knowing it wouldn't last forever I would have followed that stranger anywhere. I'm disappointed that it didn't last forever, but a 20-year ride on the greatest roller coaster on Earth beats the heck out of life in the slow lane any day. Life may never be the same, but it also isn't over, and we all have some great memories we shall never forget."

"SIERRA HAS TOUCHED LIVES – MORE SO THAN ANY OTHER GAMES DEVELOPER OF ITS TIME"

REMAKES

The *King's Quest* series has also seen a number of very impressive fan-made remakes. *King's Quest I*, *II* and *III* have all been released with VGA graphics as well as digital music and speech. AGDI added to the originals by taking the liberty of tweaking the games by including new puzzles, a deeper plot and more back story to the characters. *King's Quest I* and *II* can be downloaded from www.agdinteractive.com and *King's Quest III* from www.infamous-adventures.com. AGDI's site also offers a preview of their current work in progress: a VGA remake of *Quest For Glory II*.



» With the rise of VGA graphics and digitised sound, Sierra stepped things up by releasing excellent remakes of their original classics.

TIMELINE

Sierra's back catalogue reads as a roadmap of videogaming progress. Here's just a few of its past titles. How many do you remember?

1980-1



MYSTERY HOUSE
1980
(Apple II)
The first adventure game to ever incorporate graphics, basic as they were. Roberta Williams' *Mystery House* was the one that started it all. The game's unexpected success in an industry still in its infancy paved the way for things to come. Numerous elements of this murder-mystery themed adventure would be revisited by Williams almost a decade later in *The Colonel's Bequest*.



SOFTPORN ADVENTURE
1981
(Apple II, with a PC port released in 1991)
This text-based adult adventure, which featured a nude (yet modesty-preserving) Roberta Williams on the box, would later go on to be the inspiration for the legendary *Leisure Suit Larry* series. Much like Larry, it was widely pirated and enjoyed by young males the world over.

1983-5



KING'S QUEST: QUEST FOR THE CROWN
1983
(PC, Apple II, Tandy 1000, Amiga, Atari ST, Sega Master System)
Said to have cost IBM over $700,000 to develop, this was the title that changed the face of adventure gaming forever. Technological innovation allowed for unprecedented freedom of movement and provided players with a completely new experience that truly touched lives and elevated Roberta Williams to the status of gaming icon. *King's Quest*'s engine, the ground-breaking AGI, would be the benchmark for adventure games for years to come.

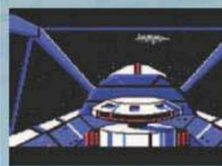


KING'S QUEST II: ROMANCING THE THRONE
1985
(PC, Apple II, Tandy 1000, Amiga, Atari ST)
AGI's first sequel provided more of what fans loved the first time round, the lack of technological advances over its predecessor doing little to affect its popularity. Here was more story, more puzzles, more of everything that had made the original such a success.

1986



THE BLACK CAULDRON
1986
(PC, Apple II, Amiga, Atari ST)
Using a slightly adapted AGI engine designed for a younger audience, *The Black Cauldron* did away with the text parser and instead used single keys for talk, use and so on. By now Sierra had a good working relationship with Disney, and the end result was an enjoyable and memorable use of the licence.



SPACE QUEST: THE SARIEN ENCOUNTER
1986
(PC, Mac, Amiga, Atari ST)
Another outstanding original that introduced us to inter-galactic loser Roger Wilco, *Space Quest* was packed with the humour and sci-fi cultural references that fans would come to love over the years. Despite being especially appealing to geeky sci-fi nuts, Scott Murphy and Mark Crowe's masterpiece had something for everyone, and went on to be one of Sierra's most popular franchises ever.

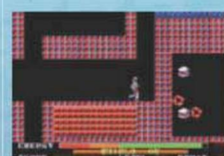


LEISURE SUIT LARRY IN THE LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS
1986
(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Tandy TRS-80)
Al Lowe's brainchild that went on to be the most pirated game of its generation, and possibly the most pirated game of all time. Everyone knows *Leisure Suit Larry*. Its risqué themes, loveable-loser protagonist and genuine laugh-out-loud funniness proved an instant hit around the globe. Larry was the everyman hero: it was great to have him doing the stupid things we'd all like to do but could never get away with in real life. *LSL* will go down in history as a landmark gaming achievement.

1987



POLICE QUEST: IN PURSUIT OF THE DEATH ANGEL
1987
(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Apple II, Apple IIGS)
A very serious, very difficult adventure, *Police Quest* oozed unparalleled realism thanks to the input from co-producer Jim Walls, a former California Highway Patrol officer of 15 years. *Police Quest* spawned a number of sequels as well as a VGA remake in 1992.



THEXDER
1987
(PC, Amiga, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Mac, Tandy TRS-80)
In an unusual departure from Sierra's typical adventure games, this side-scrolling shooter from Japanese developer Game Arts saw the player controlling a robot/jet transformer taking on hordes of high-tech enemies. Containing both platform and flying elements, interspersed with a couple of puzzling situations, there was enough variety to keep players hooked and see *Thexder* go on to be a bestseller.

1988



MANHUNTER: NEW YORK
1988
(PC, Amiga, Atari, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Mac, Tandy TRS-80)
The Murray clan's dark and foreboding tale of a world overrun by the alien Orbs was so demanding that it required modifications to the standard AGI parser in order to handle their design. Winner of the 1988 Game of the Year Award, *Manhunter: NY* offered a non-standard storyline, a non-standard interface and non-standard puzzles, which all came together to create a truly outstanding gaming experience.



SILPHEED
1988
(PC, Tandy TRS-80)
Again, Game Arts takes a standard genre and adds enough tweaks to make it rise above the crowd and, once more, Sierra makes a wise publishing choice. A vertical scrolling shooter with a perspective tweak giving the impression of 3D, fans regard *Silpheed* as a classic. Together with *Thexder*, *Silpheed* provided gamers with all the instant blasting action they needed when they felt like taking a break from solving all those damn *Quest* puzzles.



KING'S QUEST IV: THE PERILS OF ROSELLA
1989
(PC, Apple II, Apple IIGS, Amiga, Atari ST)
Sierra's first title to make use of their new SCI engine, *King's Quest IV* also saw an AGI release to cater for fans with less powerful machines. The SCI version saw Sierra introduce midi audio, the synthesized score breaking new ground in player immersion. New technology, a great story, a female protagonist and the introduction of the concept of time in terms of having day and night meant that Roberta Williams was on to yet another winner.



QUEST FOR GLORY: SO YOU WANT TO BE A HERO
1989
(PC, Amiga, Atari ST, Mac)
A true gaming milestone, this classic is heralded by some as the first truly replayable RPG/adventure hybrid. This exceptionally popular title from Lori and Corey Cole had it all: a great story, interesting characters, beautiful locations and a variety of RPG and standard quest elements which all combined to create one of the most memorable adventure games of all time. Which was your favourite – fighter, magic user or thief?



THE COLONEL'S BEQUEST
1989
(PC, Amiga, Atari ST)
Roberta Williams' great – although quite complex – murder mystery, which first introduced us to Laura Bow. Set in the mansion and surrounding grounds of the Dijon Estate in the Twenties and themed as a play set over a number of Acts, this was an excellently crafted game. Being very dialogue driven, *The Colonel's Bequest*'s varied characters had true depth and personality. The storyline presented an enthralling mystery with lies, red herrings and many great twists along the way.

1989

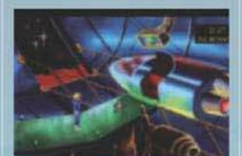


CONQUESTS OF CAMELOT: THE SEARCH FOR THE GRAIL
1990
(PC, Amiga, Atari ST)
Offering a level of depth and detail that stands head and shoulders above many of the adventure games available at the time, this title pushed the SCI engine to the limits. With RPG elements, action sequences, great puzzles plus a box bursting with background material, *Conquests Of Camelot* was peppered with so much Grail-lore and historical authenticity that it was not merely a game so much as an engaging and inspiring lesson in Arthurian legend.



KING'S QUEST V: ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GO YONDER
1990
(PC, Amiga, Mac, NES)
Massively hyped, and for good reason, *King's Quest V* heralded a new epoch in Sierra's legacy. CD-ROM technology, 256-colour VGA graphics, digitised speech, a new mouse-driven interface and a professionally mastered soundtrack brought Roberta Williams' game world to life more than ever before.

1990



SPACE QUEST I: THE SARIEN ENCOUNTER
(VGA remake)
1991
(PC, Amiga, Mac)
One of a number of VGA remakes to the original Sierra classics, *SQ1VGA* brought back everything we loved about the original repackaged in 256-colour graphics and digital sound. As with Sierra's other VGA remakes, the new control system did make some of the older puzzles slightly easier, however.



LEISURE SUIT LARRY V: PASSIONATE PATTI IN PURSUIT OF THE PULSATING PECTORALS
1991
(PC, Amiga, Mac)
Larry's first foray into the world of 256-colour point-and-click wonderfulness left fans asking 'but what about *LSL IV*?!?'. Another fun and funny adventure game from Al Lowe, which had the player controlling both Larry and his female counterpart, the very sexy Passionate Patti.

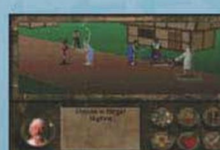
1991



FREDDY PHARKAS: FRONTIER PHARMACIST
1993
(PC, Mac)
Al Lowe's popular alternative to Larry with more than enough adult-themed humour to keep the fan base happy. The originality of this Wild West adventure, plus its memorable characters and storyline, warranted *Freddy Pharkas* as a classic in its own right.



GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS
1993
(PC, Mac)
Jane Jensen's darkly themed gothic thriller appealed to an older audience and had all the right qualities to instantly garner a loyal fan base. The puzzles were tough, the storyline was deep, and the popular response led to the development of a number of sequels over the years.



BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR
1993
(PC)
Based on the acclaimed fantasy series by Raymond E Feist, *Betrayal At Krondor* added to an already stellar year of outings from Sierra. An engrossing story, real actors, a unique combat system plus a huge game world saw Dynamix's RPG receive praise from newcomers and Feist loyalists alike.

1993



PHANTASMAGORIA
1995
(PC, Mac, PlayStation, Sega Saturn)
Roberta Williams' drastic departure from the bright and good-natured *King's Quest* series, *Phantasmagoria* was Sierra's jump on the 'interactive movie' bandwagon. A dark horror game spread over seven CD-ROMs using recorded video of human actors throughout; this title definitely holds a place in Sierra's hall of fame.



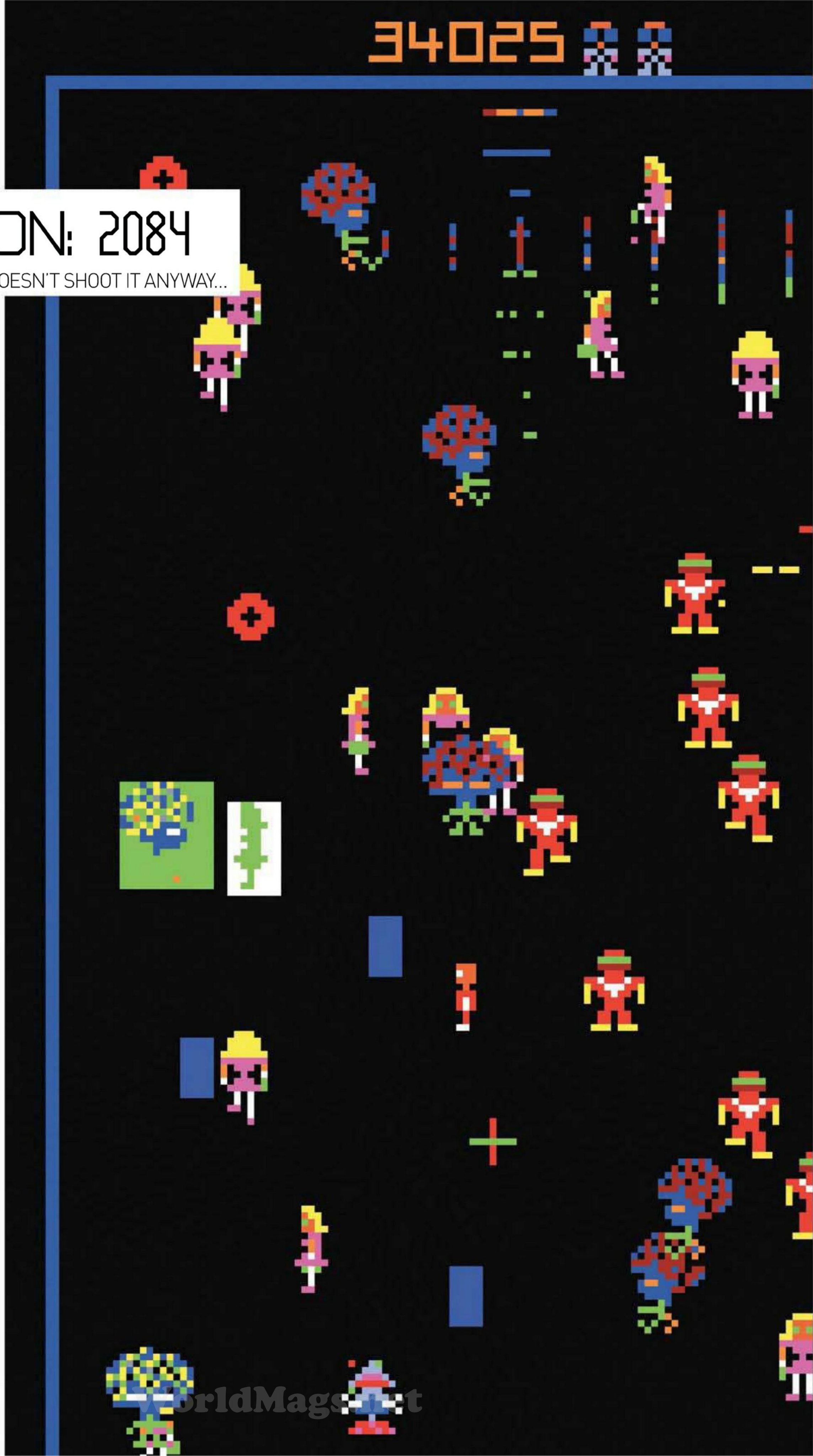
THE REALM
1996
(PC)
A bold attempt at a massively multiplayer online social experience years before the internet was ready for it, *The Realm* was a great idea that suffered from being too much too soon. A shining example of how Sierra's brilliance in concepts and innovations was at times let down by technological limitations.

1995-6



KING'S QUEST VIII: MASK OF ETERNITY
1998
(PC)
Regarded as a major disappointment by many long-time *King's Quest* fans, the game was very poorly received. With an uninspired 3D engine, clumsy platformer action sequences plus the absence of the much of the 'love' that was seen in previous titles, *KQ VIII* was a clear indication that all was not well at Sierra headquarters.

1998



ROBOTRON: 2084

IF IT MOVES SHOOT IT, IF IT DOESN'T SHOOT IT ANYWAY…



- **PUBLISHER:** WILLIAMS
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1,000 FOR ORIGINAL MACHINE

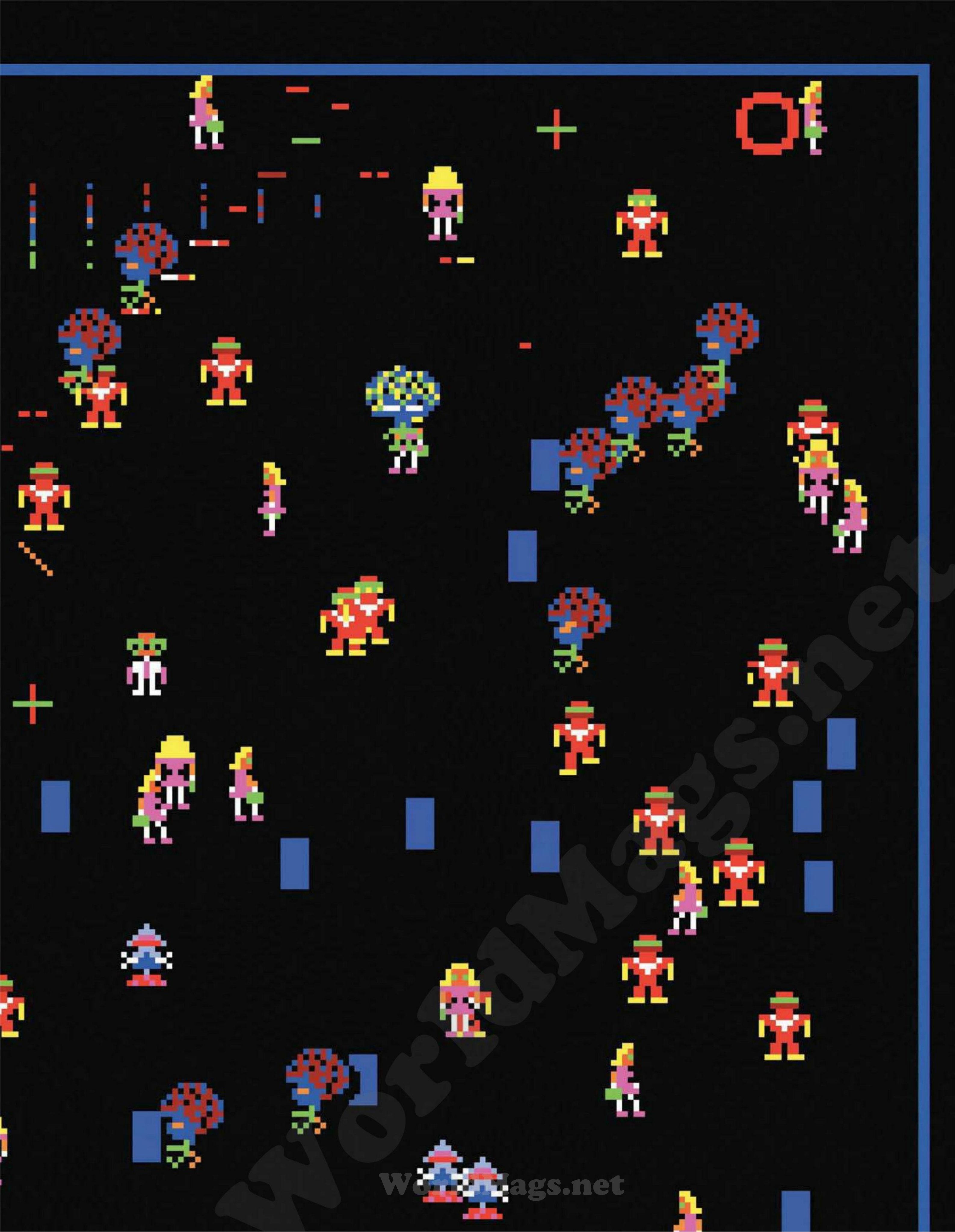


HISTORY

Play *Robotron: 2084* for just a few minutes and you immediately become entranced by its eye-catching visuals, excellent use of sound, and fast, responsive controls. Play *Robotron* for 30 minutes and your arms are starting to ache, the sweat is profusely pouring from your brow and the on-screen enemies are beginning to blend into a dizzying kaleidoscope of colours – but you're still playing and can't seem to release your grip on its dual joysticks. Play *Robotron* for 24 years (although not in one go) and it finally becomes obvious why it constantly appears in our Desert Island Disks section (nine times to date). It's quite possibly one of the most balanced games ever made, and even today it constantly appears on various compilations and services such as Xbox Live Arcade.

Eugene Jarvis once told me in an interview that the original concept for the game had you trying to steer the game's many enemies into the numerous electrodes that could be found on each level. Fortunately, Jarvis had a change of heart and decided that killing things with lasers would be a lot more fun. He wasn't wrong and *Robotron* went on to enthral gamers everywhere.

Taking part in single-screen arenas, each level is deceptively simple, as it requires you to do little more than blast everything on the screen, while rescuing stranded humans. You start to realise that you're going to need more than simple reflexes in order to achieve the highest score. Rescuing humans is the key to this, as constantly saving people without losing a life will cause your score to shoot up considerably. *Robotron*'s many different enemies show surprising levels of intelligence for the time and after a few stages you'll find yourself in a desperate fight against their overwhelming numbers, proving that Jarvis's creation is certainly not a game for the faint of heart. Don't be fooled by its simple looks and gaudy sound effects, *Robotron* is quite simply one of the greatest games ever conceived and should be experienced by everyone.



The Definitive

FROGGER

STUART CAMPBELL ALSO DROWNS IF HE FALLS INTO WATER (ASK THE CREW OF HMS OCELOT), SO WHO BETTER COULD THERE BE TO GUIDE US THROUGH THE WORLD OF MYSTERIOUSLY INCAPABLE AMPHIBIANS?

It's kind of amazing, if you think about how many tens of thousands of videogames there have been, to realise just how few have ever existed that you can play with only one hand (you can make up your own *Sam Fox Strip Poker* joke at this point, if you like). Indeed, ask the average gamer in the street and he'd have a pretty hard time coming up with a single one between *Pac-Man* in 1980 (and its first few sequels) and *Super Monkey Ball*, released over 20 years later. Ask the slightly (above) average gamer, though, and he'll probably hit you straight away with *Frogger*. The annoying smartarse.

From such simple uni-dextrous beginnings, though, *Frogger* has not only gradually evolved into a convoluted franchise encompassing several very different types of game, but the branches of its family tree most directly derived from the coin-op original are now also ironically among the most complicated arcade-style games you can play, with controls that you could do with a third or fourth hand to operate smoothly. How has such a situation come to pass? Really, the only sensible way to explain it would be if someone could somehow take you on a trip through the entire chronology of the series, looking at every single one of the 22 distinct and separate *Frogger* games and analyse the way the franchise has broken up into at least three identifiable factions, all pursuing their own goals across a variety of formats for very different audiences. Unfortunately, there's nobody in the world with that sort of dedication to the cause of clarifying the tangled histories of classic videogames, so sadly it will never be possible to – what's that? There IS? And they happen to be passing by at this very moment? Quick, grab them!

1981
FROGGER (ARCADE)

The single screen, block-based movement and basic controls make *Frogger* one of the simplest and most ubiquitous videogames of all time. A format hasn't been made that couldn't host an acceptable version of it, and there have been over 20 official licensed ports as well as countless hundreds of knock-off clones. In fact, some formats even got more than one – the official Atari VCS version was a crude-looking effort, but the bizarre Supercharger cassette-tape peripheral for the console also had an official *Frogger* (Parker Brothers, makers of the cart game, had understandably only thought to buy the solid-state media rights) made for it, which was hugely superior.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The original arcade game is included as a bonus feature in *Ancient Shadow* (according to the box, anyway – we've never found it), and is also available, complete with a very pretty enhanced version, on Xbox Live Arcade. But for maximum fun you should play it in MAME. If you use the emulator's built-in cheat function and play with infinite time, you can actually listen to the background tune all the way to the end – normally you get barely halfway through it before the time limit runs out and you die.

» The enhanced mode of the 360 game comes off better than almost all of the other arcade classics that have been resprayed for XBLA, so it's well worth a screenshot.



» The only other official versions to split the playfield in two were the 1982 Odyssey2 release, the Game Boy one almost 20 years later, and an atrocious recent Java port for mobile phones.



1981
FROGGER (ZX81)

There are so many landmarks attached to this port that it deserves a separate mention. For a start, if this isn't the first ever officially licensed arcade-to-home-computer conversion, we can't think of what would beat it. And it certainly must at the very least be the quickest one of its era, unprecedentedly coming out within months of its coin-op parent at a time when you usually had to wait four or five years to have a chance of seeing an arcade hit on a home micro. It's also, to our knowledge, the only officially licensed game of any kind ever to appear on the ZX81. This is a very impressive piece of software for the primitive Sinclair machine, splitting the arcade playfield into two separate screens, with the second one boasting huge pseudo-3D graphics including a monstrous crocodile half the width of the screen. All the coin-op features are there, from crocs to flies to lady frogs and diving turtles, and it whips along at a pace that ought to have been well beyond the Neanderthal hardware.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The decent ZX81 emulator VB81.

The Definitive
FROGGER



» The only goal in Stage two is to get a single frog on the dinghy being towed behind the boat.



» There are actually over 50 levels, of which this one is thematically the closest to the first *Frogger*.



1984
FROGGER 2: THREEEDEEP! (COLECOVISION)

The first follow-up to *Frogger* was a game so confusing and messed-up that even after more than 20 years it's impossible to figure out what in God's name was going through the minds of its designers (although we can hazard a guess as to what was going through their bloodstream). Ever since the release of the first game and throughout its subsequent history, commentators everywhere have delighted in pointing out how zany it is that if you fall in water in *Frogger* you die, despite frogs being AMPHIBIANS and therefore perfectly happy to spend much of their lives in the water. Ker-razy! Well, in *Frogger 2: Threeedeep!* that little oversight gets corrected. At least it does on Stage one, where our slimy-skinned star is able to scoot around in the water of a river without a care in the world, dodging alligators and large fish which are deadly to the touch, but apparently able to jump around on smaller fish, which he merely can't stand still on. On Stage two, on the other hand, the water is deadly again (what?) and instead of having to avoid alligators you have to jump on their backs (what?) and if you touch a mother duck it carries you off to another stage set in the sky (WHAT?) unless you're sitting on one of its babies, in which case it kills you. Obviously.

Threeedeep! is a horribly vague game, not only in the unfathomability of where you're supposed to be going but also in the schizophrenic mix of pixel movement and block movement, whereby sometimes you can jump between adjacent lily pads and sometimes you fall in between them and drown, depending on which split-second you jumped onto them from a log. What Frogger's doing in the sky on Stage three is anyone's guess, as is the identity of the indeterminate flapping things that make holes appear in the clouds below him when he touches them. Weird, but not at all wonderful.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The misleadingly named Coleco emu BlueMSX gets the job done. *Threeedeep!* was also adequately converted to many other formats, including the C64 and Atari VCS and 5200.

1991
RIBBIT! (ARCADE)

Sega marked the tenth anniversary of the first *Frogger* with a game which, although it doesn't actually bear the *Frogger* name anywhere, is a sequel in every other sense (and the only one to ever appear in arcades). The one-stick, no-buttons control method is straight from the original, as is the core gameplay, except this time it's focused on the bonus flies you used to collect when jumping into one of the frog homes. Here you chase them all over the screen, but the obstacles are basically the same – spiders patrol sideways across the screen like the cars of the parent game, and there are still logs and swimming turtles to help you across rivers. It's fast moving (levels typically take less than 20 seconds), cute and a lot of fun, and a much more faithful sequel than many of the later ones that would actually carry on the family name.

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME.

1991
FROGGER (PROTOTYPE) (GAME GEAR)

As alert readers will come to realise throughout the course of this feature, naming isn't the strong point of the *Frogger* series. This never-released prototype was the first of many games, which would simply go under the name '*Frogger*' while actually being entirely new sequels. This is a very sweet little game, comprised of levels each containing several sets of road and river crossings populated by a wide variety of inhabitants, ranging from swans, trams, elephants, Chinese New Year dragons, and even (alarmingly) tanks. In each level you have to go and collect three baby frogs and bring them back home – you can either rescue them one at a time, or try to save time by getting all three in one trip, but risk losing them all if you get killed. There are also fruits littered around that can provide bonus points or extra lives, tempting you into more trouble. It's simple, addictive, classic *Frogger*, and you always want to see what new weirdness is on the next level. This accomplished little game never saw a release due to Sega's rights to *Frogger* expiring, so be grateful you can finally enjoy it.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The excellent multi-Sega emu Fusion certainly plays *Frogger* perfectly.

» There are bonus stages too. This isn't one of them, but it seemed as good a place as any to mention it.





» Of all the updated versions of original *Frogger*, the graphics in the PSone game are *Retro Gamer*'s favourites.

1997
FROGGER (PLAYSTATION, PC)

In the mid-to-late 1990s, when you had to be dumber than a drunk moose to fail to make money on PlayStation games, publishers were in hog heaven. Everyone and his dog (by which we mean Hasbro and Activision) was going ape crazy remaking classic arcade games, and often giving players kittens in the process. Lost among a shoal of lesser fish in a pool of big sharks like *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids* and *Defender*, this excellent update of *Frogger* didn't get the love it deserved at the time – in a fair world punters would have flocked to it like moths to a flame. The injustice of the situation could easily send a man a bit squirrelly, because this is a smashing little game, capturing the essence of the original as surely as a hawk swooping on a vole, and tearing it into loads of varied levels that are as small as a mouse, as wily as a fox and as mean as a snake. Ferociously hard and set against a tigerish time limit, half the challenge was simply finding out where everything in the level was in the 30 seconds or so before the timer slipped away from you like a greased eel – worrying about how to beat it was a whole other problem. A clever structure kept it addictive without being overly frustrating, too. It really is the bee's knees.

PLAY IT NOW ON: ePSXe runs this fairly well (the game itself is fine but some of the menus and cut-scenes are blank), but again, if you're wise enough to have a PSP with custom firmware, the game works excellently on the handheld and, like most PSone games, it looks twice as good on the little screen as it ever did on a telly or a monitor.

The Definitive

FROGGER

» A homebrew effort released for the SNES two years earlier had more effort spent on it than this official version.



1998
FROGGER (SNES/GBC)

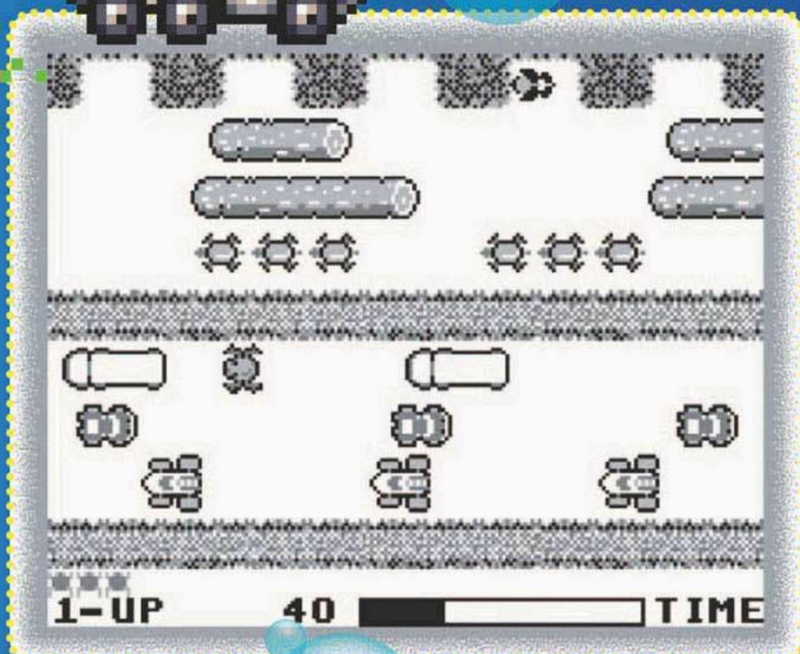
Frogger has the distinction of being the last ever official game release on not one, but two different consoles. The Mega Drive's curtain-closer, also released in 1998, is a straight, un-enhanced port of the 1981 coin-op (except that it forces you to have five lives instead of three) so we won't trouble you with it here, but the SNES version is an entirely new remake. Very similar to the Game Boy Color version also developed by Majesco at the same time, the SNES game is a nasty hack job with primitive graphics, bad collision detection and no music at all, not even the traditional *Frogger* starting jingle that the GBC version managed (although at least, unlike the GBC game, the SNES frog wasn't twice the size of the cars). Presumably this sudden flurry of *Frogger* activity was born on the back of the PSone remake, and it's an object lesson in just how cynical and cheap the videogames industry can be when it thinks nobody's looking.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The SNES emulator ZSNES.

1999
FROGGER (GAME.COM)

Tiger's Game.com might have beaten the DS by six years to claim the rightful title of 'first touch-screen handheld console' (and it boasted internet connectivity too), but it was a dreadful atrocity of a machine crippled by an incredibly blurry screen and a painfully slow CPU. Nevertheless, a few companies made games for it during its fruit fly of a lifespan (just 20 known titles were ever released), and Hasbro was by far its biggest supporter, knocking out versions of several of its best-known properties. The GCOM's *Frogger* contained a curious interpretation of the original game, with just three lanes each of road and river (instead of the proper five), and abruptly ended after 13 levels rather than continuing indefinitely like its predecessor. More noteworthy was the new remake version also found on the cart, which had enhanced graphics and interesting features like levels made up entirely of roadway or solely of river. It's not saying much to observe that it's one of the system's best games, but if you should come across the console for 50 pence in a car boot sale, make sure you get *Frogger* with it.

PLAY IT NOW ON: That car boot sale is currently your only chance of getting to play this we are afraid, as there's no publicly released GCOM emulator. The MESS team is working on a driver, and allegedly a native development emulator by Tiger was leaked, but the people who claim to have obtained it are enjoying crowing about it far too much to let anyone else actually play. Spoil sports.



» In both the classic and updated versions you can choose to start on any of the 13 levels, making this screenshot of Level one something of a disappointment.

2000
FROGGER 2: SWAMPY'S REVENGE (PSONE, PC, DREAMCAST)

While the first PlayStation *Frogger* was very much an arcade high-score game in the same tradition as the original, the sequel to the remake started to move down a different path. The main game in *Swampy's Revenge* was, while superficially similar, much more linear, with the player never in any doubt where they were supposed to go next thanks to a more zoomed-out viewpoint. There's no point scoring at all, and the twin aims of the game are to complete levels in record time and to collect all the coins secreted around them. Getting every single coin in a stage unlocks the game's cutest feature – a series of short time-attack levels, which take the graphics from the original coin-op and depict them in a 3D style reminiscent of *Tron* or, for younger readers, *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions*.

The biggest problem with *Swampy's Revenge* is that there isn't much of it – with just sixteen normal levels (most of which are only around two minutes long) and ten of the retro VR missions, you'll almost certainly clear it in a day, and once you've beaten the built-in times on each level there's little incentive to play again. But it's sweet while it lasts.



» There are also some fun multiplayer head-to-head games, several of which take place in the VR levels.



» There are only so many times you can look at pictures of a frog on a road near a river before brain rot finally sets in.

2000
FROGGER 2 (GAME BOY COLOR)

The naming fiasco continues with this – which is actually the third distinct game to carry the title *Frogger 2* – because despite being released at the same time and with the same box artwork, this is NOT *Swampy's Revenge* (the words have been cunningly airbrushed out of the box and label art, and don't appear anywhere on screen either). What you get here is pure original *Frogger*-type gameplay, in a style that sits somewhere between the PSone remake and the unreleased Game Gear title. Pretty much the only thing it has in common with *Swampy's Revenge* is that each level can either be zipped through to beat the time record, or you can methodically explore to find and collect all the items – in this case score-boosting diamonds. Later levels introduce puzzle elements (the Ice Caves, for example, are sheet ice with only a few safe spots, that you have to slide between), but there's not too much thinking involved – this is straightforward arcade fun. Again, it's not vast and you'll almost certainly have worked through every level in a day, but at least with the high-score table there's always something to come back for.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.

2001
FROGGER'S ADVENTURES: TEMPLE OF THE FROG (GAME BOY ADVANCE)

The following year's GBA debut saw *Frogger* take a bigger leap in the direction started by *Swampy's Revenge*, towards what would become the dominant form for games in the series. In essence a platform game despite the overhead-view perspective, you get five element-themed worlds (each broken up into stages) of precarious manoeuvring that's conceptually closest to something like *Manic Miner* (no, it's not the most immediately obvious comparison, but if you examine the gameplay that's what it is). It's extremely zippily-paced and it starts to get difficult pretty early on, but never in an unfair way – deaths are usually the result of panicking or rushing where a cool head and patience would have got you through safely, so you dive in again, but because you know what's coming you think you can race through this time and bam, you're squished again. If you'll forgive the mixed onomatopoeia. The addictive nature of the gameplay can once more probably see the whole thing polished off in a day, but if you're disciplined enough to do a stage or two at a time and then switch off, there's weeks of Frogging fun here. (The cart has four save slots, enabling you to go back to an earlier version if you want to build up a stockpile of lives for a particularly tricky stage or for your little sister to have a game at the same time.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.

» The very first stage pays fulsome tribute to the classic *Frogger* themes.



The Definitive FROGGER

2002
KONAMI COLLECTOR'S SERIES: ARCADE CLASSICS (GBA)

This six-game compilation contains a fine selection of very well reproduced games (entirely wrecked by lack of high-score saving, but that's another issue), and the port of *Frogger* is extremely faithful, copying the coin-op graphics precisely – the screen scrolls vertically to fit everything in – though for some reason having entirely new music (not even the same new music that was in the Game Boy versions). Much more interesting, though, is that like the other games on the compilation, if you enter the famous Konami cheat code (Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A), you unlock a whole new version with greatly enhanced graphics and still more brand-new music.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



» See? Enhanced.



» Apparently turtles (and worms) can now breathe indefinitely under water too.

2002
FROGGER ADVANCE: THE GREAT QUEST (GBA)

Being a retro games lover, the chances are that you remember the SNES/ Mega Drive era. If you do, you'll recall that it was a time of endless third-rate collect-'em-up platform games with oversized graphics and cutesy animal characters like Bubsy the Bobcat, Aero the Acro-Bat, Chester the Cheetah, Mortimer the Marmoset, Ian the Intestinal Parasite and God knows who else. Well, guess what? Those days are back, or at least they were in 2002 when Konami decided for no good reason at all that what the *Frogger* franchise really needed was a crap-awful 2D platform game where you trudged your way through endless levels of dull, slow identikit worlds picking up thousands and thousands and thousands of little coins to no great purpose until you died of general terribleness.

But wait! There's a twist! Remember how Frogger can't swim, except he sort of could in bits of *Frogger 2: Threedeep*, but everyone quietly pretends that never happened and isn't really part of the proper *Frogger* history? Well, get this – in *Frogger Advance: The Great Quest*, our hero swims like a goddamn dolphin. Levels are just chock-full of underwater caves through which the froggy little fella will glide and dive and plunge and frolic all day long without so much as having to come up for a breath. Man, sometimes we think we should just hand the videogames industry over to chimps in dungarees and flat caps and be done with it.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.

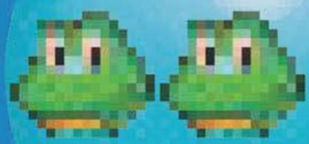
» If there's one thing you can say about *The Great Quest*, it's that it doesn't skimp on the green.



2002
FROGGER: THE GREAT QUEST (PC, PS2)

Despite sharing (almost) the same name, the PC and PS2 versions of *The Great Quest* could scarcely resemble the GBA game any less. Rather than side-on 2D platforming, what you get here is yet another entirely different type of game carrying the *Frogger* name, this time *Zelda*-ish RPG antics in a gloomy olive palette that's well suited to the unexciting nature of the gameplay. The only things this *Great Quest* shares with its handheld cousin are that they're the only games in the series with 'free' movement rather than the trademark grid-based leaping that characterises every other title in the line, and that Frogger still has the ability to swim. But enjoy the skill while you can, because it's the last you'll see of it – every subsequent game will see our heroic amphibian drown the instant he touches water again. Sigh.

PLAY IT NOW ON: PC or PS2.



» For some reason you get one fewer save slot this time, so if you've got more than two little sisters you're a bit buggered.

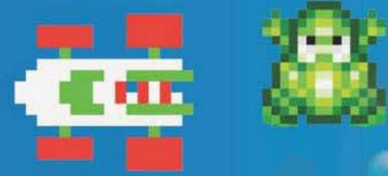


2002
FROGGER'S ADVENTURES 2: THE LOST WAND (GBA)

Curiously, the only two languages you're offered at the start are American and Spanish, but otherwise this is cut from very much the same cloth as the quinti-lingual *Temple Of The Frog*, to the extent that it's really just a new set of levels for the same game. The only real step forward this time is that you get a bunch of simple multiplayer link-up games, three of them playable with a single cart and more for players who have a cart each, and also a Time Attack mode for levels you've completed (the only step backwards, on the other hand, is a long and hatefully unskippable intro cut-scene). Again it's all about getting into the rhythm of moving platforms and fixed-patrol monsters, again it's quick and fun and highly addictive, and again there isn't an especially vast amount of it, so before I have to say 'again' again, let's move on.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Like all the GBA *Frogger* games, *The Lost Wand* looks beautiful on the backlit screen of an imported SP or a GBA Micro, but we particularly advise playing this one via emulation, because when you've just died for the 46th time on the boss stage of the icy second level, it's a lot harder to hurl your PC out of the window in frustration.







2003
FROGGER'S ADVENTURES: THE RESCUE (PS2, PC, GAMECUBE)

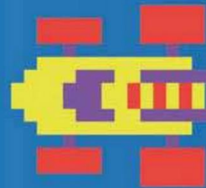
Among the many fixed-overhead-view grid-based *Frogger* games of recent years, although they all look broadly the same, there are two quite distinct types. The GBA *Frogger's Adventures* titles, for example, are in essence actually platform games. Your objectives are usually pretty clear and linear, and it's just a case of manipulating the controls deftly and swiftly enough to traverse the environment safely, often in situations where a single wrong step will see you crumpled by an enemy or plunging to your death. But the second type, which includes games like *The Rescue*, are noticeably more thoughtful and puzzle-focused, with little in the way of pressing danger but a fair bit of head-scratching required if you're going to figure out the way to your goal. They're still unforgivingly structured, with an unpleasant tendency to send you back a very long way when you run out of lives, but at least here you can choose to give yourself a generous seven to start with to reduce the problem a bit. This is one of the more likeable of the later *Frogger*s, with slightly simpler controls (no vertical jump) and a difficulty level that's gently challenging rather than outright hostile.

PLAY IT NOW ON: PS2, PC or GameCube. Make sure you have a joypad if you choose the PC version, as the control method makes things very unpleasant if you're trying to play with the keyboard.

» The wrecking-ball puzzle immediately preceding this boss stage had us stumped for a good few minutes.



The Definitive
FROGGER



2003
FROGGER BEYOND (PC, XBOX, GAMECUBE)

It's got a hip-hop theme song. Christ. *Frogger Beyond* takes a short step away from the fixed-view grids and back towards the gameplay design of the first PSone *Frogger*, and is almost as viciously difficult, only without the saving grace of the levels being really small. You get a reasonably generous supply of lives, with extra ones scattered around, but if you do manage to run out before the end of a ten-minute level, it's all the way back to the start for you. While movement is still grid-based, the developers have tried to pep up the visuals by having things scroll around a bit in different directions and not look so much like a grid. This serves only to introduce confusion, as you can't quite tell where things are or whether you can jump to them or not, leading to some unfair and annoying deaths. Such incidents are just rare enough not to ruin the game, though, and *Frogger Beyond* is reasonably good fun if you want to play a new-style *Frogger* game on a grown-up console rather than the handhelds it's rather better suited to. *The Rescue* is better, though.

PLAY IT NOW ON: PC, Xbox or GameCube.

» Wow. A slippy-slidey ice world and a runaway-mine cart level – TOGETHER AT LAST!



2003
FROGGER'S JOURNEY: FORGOTTEN RELIC (GBA)

Continuing its ill-advised experimentation on the GBA, Konami next decided to turn out another *Zelda*-inspired RPG, this time modelled after the SNES incarnation of the classic Nintendo series. Like many second-rate *Zelda* wannabes, what that basically amounts to is endless back-and-forth errand running, with almost nothing in the way of actual gameplay to speak of, and certainly nothing bearing even a slight passing connection to *Frogger*. The nearest it gets to either are a few lengthy maze sections with coins to collect and enemies to dodge, but they're nothing a six-year-old couldn't cope with and appear to exist only as a token attempt to break up the cut-scenes and hackneyed plot (which, incidentally, casts Frogger as a sort if Indiana Jones-type all-action archaeologist). Appropriately enough, this is a highly forgettable game.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



» This is as far as we could bear to play into *Forgotten Relic* again to get a screenshot.



» How the hell does he fit that enormous tongue into his tiny little head?

2005
FROGGER: ANCIENT SHADOW (PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE)

Konami farmed this one out to highly respected developer Hudson Soft, so it comes as something of a surprise that it's such an unmitigatedly loathsome heap of stinking pig poo. We haven't hated a game this much in years, and the fact that it's aimed at kids makes us shudder – no wonder some teenagers spend their nights hanging around on street corners if they've spent their formative years having this sort of thing inflicted on them in the name of recreational fun. This surly, dishonest, spiteful excuse for a videogame mostly comprises contorting the stupidly overcomplicated controls to jump hopefully into thin air as you try to guess where platforms are from the impossible-to-judge perspective, and hoping that if you do land on one it isn't going to suddenly collapse beneath you without warning – despite looking identical to a safe one – using up half of your tiny energy pie, which once exhausted dumps you all the way back past the last three checkpoints to the very start of a long, agonisingly tedious level. If it does, there's no shame at all in shedding a few tears – *Frogger: Ancient Shadow* could make a statue cry. An absolutely appalling game that should be avoided at all costs.

PLAY IT NOW ON: A day when you want to make yourself really angry.

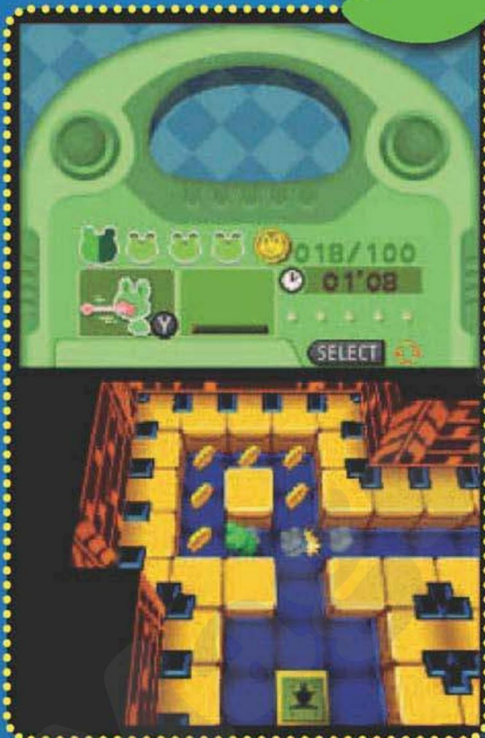
» Among its many mini-games, *Helmet Chaos* includes one called 'Rib-It'. A little tribute to the overlooked 1991 arcade game, or just a weak pun? Only you can decide.



2005
FROGGER: HELMET CHAOS (DS, PSP)

Released on the same day as *Ancient Shadow*, fortunately *Helmet Chaos* is an altogether less grotesque affair, belonging to the same puzzle-centric bloodline as *The Rescue* rather than the faster-paced platforming of *Temple Of The Frog* or *The Lost Wand*. It's got some neat touches of its own, such as when it suddenly turns into a *Super Monkey Ball* clone a few levels in, and also boasts a rather lovely cartoony polygon-graphics remake of the original *Frogger*, which makes use of both DS screens to replicate the coin-op's vertical orientation (on the PSP you have to rotate the console 90 degrees to play the *Frogger* remake, which is horrible, but the main game has slightly prettier graphics to compensate). There are several other mini-games to unlock, too, and lots of fun interludes to break up the in-game action (such as an impromptu version of the Game & Watch classic *Fire*), and generally this is a warm-hearted and pleasant, if never exactly thrilling, modern-style *Frogger*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: If only for the superior remake of the arcade game, the DS version is the best choice.



» Risking DEATH ITSELF for you, the readers, we eventually managed to conquer the river race by elaborate cheating. The subsequent stages are even more ghastly, mixing all the tortuous, dishonest grinds of the earlier stages with the split-second reactions of PSone *Frogger* and even more stomach-churning plot expositions.

2006
MY FROGGER TOY TRIALS (DS)

Oh man. As appalling as *Ancient Shadow* was, at least it didn't (to the best of our knowledge) give anyone brain damage. *My Frogger Toy Trials* can't even make that claim, however. At first it's superficially like *The Rescue* again, albeit this time disfigured with a thick, choking layer of toe-curlingly twee *Pokémon*-type plot involving lots of tedious hub-shuttling and cut-scene-watching to get between the actual game stages. But after about half an hour of dull, barely-disguised tutorial levels full of unfair nastiness like blind leaps into danger and perspective tricks comes an interlude.

It takes the form of a water race in which the unfortunate player is compelled to (oh no) blow into the DS microphone to propel their floating frog, for OVER A MINUTE. You don't think that sounds like much, hey? Then try it now – blow as hard as you can, without pausing at all, for about 70 seconds (which is what you will have to do to stay in front of your opponent, a single touch from whom loses you the race). Just don't do it on your own, as the oxygen starvation to your brain will more than likely cause you to faint and you don't want to bang your head on anything sharp when you fall over (we stopped, light-headed, after about 15 seconds). Even if you don't die, if you're not an Olympic triathlete the game might as well end at that point, so unless you want to spend £30 for 25 minutes of annoying, frustrating maze-trekking, steer clear of this criminally irresponsible garbage like your life depended on it.

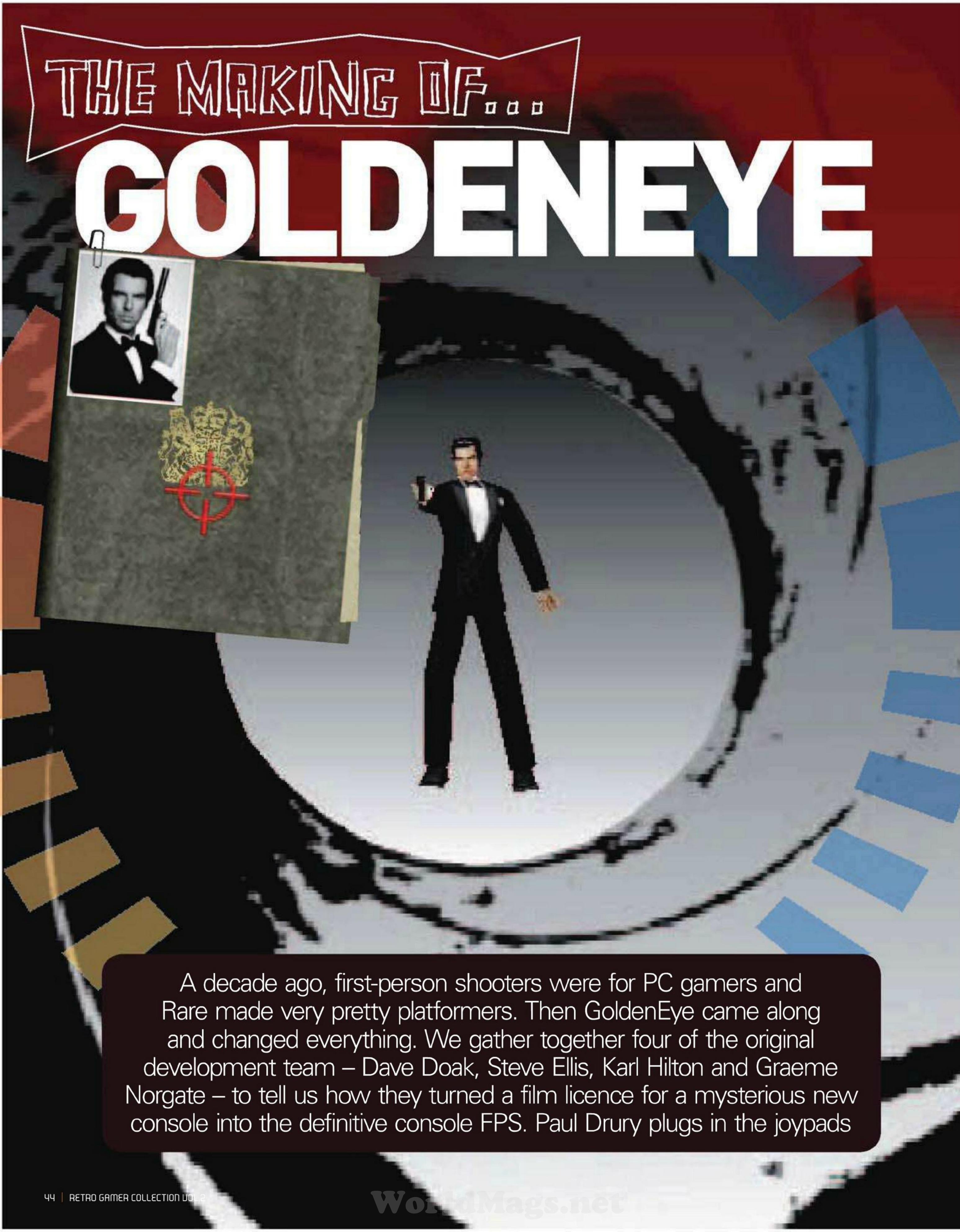
PLAY IT NOW ON: For God's sake don't. We can't afford to have half of our readers die.

2007
KONAMI KIDS PLAYGROUND: FROGGER HOP, SKIP & JUMPIN' FUN (PS2)

We haven't actually played this semi-educational dance-mat videogame aimed at pre-school children, but after the absolute horror of *Toy Trials* we imagine it's about getting the lids off Mummy and Daddy's medicine bottles, drinking stuff that you find in the cupboard under the kitchen sink, and playing around in heavy traffic. Actually, that last one's probably true, isn't it?

THE MAKING OF...

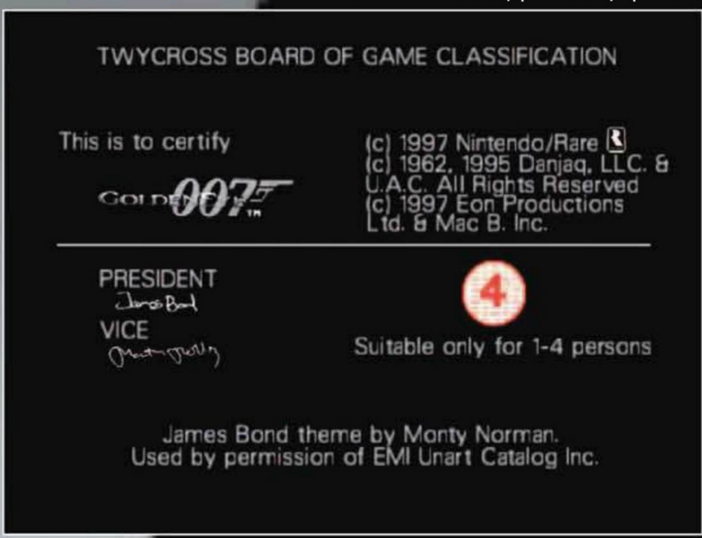
GOLDENEYE



A decade ago, first-person shooters were for PC gamers and Rare made very pretty platformers. Then GoldenEye came along and changed everything. We gather together four of the original development team – Dave Doak, Steve Ellis, Karl Hilton and Graeme Norgate – to tell us how they turned a film licence for a mysterious new console into the definitive console FPS. Paul Drury plugs in the joypads



» Proof of the amount of work the boys put into *GoldenEye*'s presentation.



Pub bores the world over be silenced. We know who the best Bond is. It's Roger Moore. Wait, come back. We have empirical evidence.

"Right near the end of development," explains Dave Doak, "a guy came in from EON who owned the Bond licence and saw we had put in Connery, Dalton and Moore as well as Brosnan. We thought it would be great for marketing and even some screenshots went out with Connery in his white tuxedo. Then an edict came down from on high and we had to get rid of the other Bonds, so on the day we had to take them out we played this epic deathmatch – first to a hundred kills – which went on for about three hours. Mark Edmonds played as Moore and won by one kill. It went down to the wire…"

GoldenEye's enthralling multiplayer shootouts were thus denied an intriguing proposition. But then the game was never conceived as a four-player grudge match. In fact, it wasn't even conceived as an FPS at all in the beginning. Karl Hilton recalls the first mooting of the project: "I started at Rare in October 1994 and they had me modelling cars and weapons to see if I could do it for no particular game. Martin Hollis wandered in – he tended to float around – and said he was leading a team to do a *Bond* game. I'd been highlighted as someone who might be interested and of course I was, but in the back of my mind I was thinking, 'Oh God, a film licence.' The previous ones had been 2D *Robocop* or *Batman* games and they were generally awful. It seemed a risky project."

"THE FIRST THING I DID WAS MODEL THE GAS PLANT. YOU COULD FOLLOW A ROUTE THROUGH THE LEVEL LIKE IN VIRTUA COP. THEN WE DECIDED TO TAKE IT OFF THE RAILS" KARL HILTON

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **DEVELOPER:** RARE
» **RELEASED:** 1997
» **GENRE:** FIRST PERSON SHOOTER
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

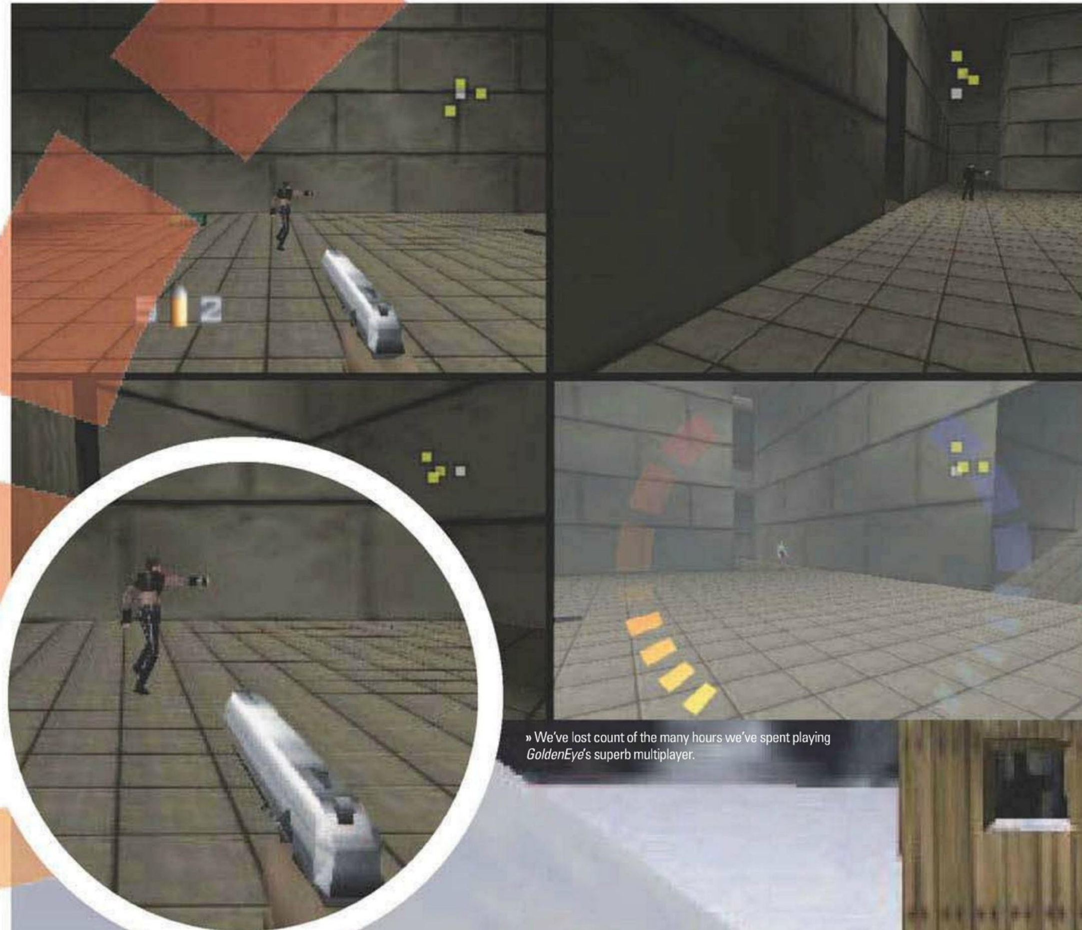


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TIMESPLITTERS
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2000

SECOND SIGHT
SYSTEMS: PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE, PC
YEAR: 2004

HAZE
SYSTEMS: PS3, 360, PC
YEAR: 2008



» We've lost count of the many hours we've spent playing *GoldenEye*'s superb multiplayer.



» The opening of each level perfectly captured the cinematic nature of the original film.

PLAY AND LEARN CHRIS

"We didn't know whether multiplayer was technically possible," admits Steve. "It was an experiment that didn't begin until May… and the game came out in August! I trawled through the code to find anything that referred to the player and made it work for more than one. I got it going for two first and then frame rates meant it couldn't work for all levels. Karl went off and built the Complex and Temple and had strict instructions not to put more than so many polygons and textures on screen. Then it was just a case of playing it."

Graeme: "I first saw it as four-player split screen and said, 'Wow Martin, you've got multiplayer!' He was, 'Oh no, no, you didn't see that, it's a complete secret…' The concern was that half the coding team was being allocated to some frivolous thing that might not work. The Stampers had actually said, no multiplayer. Chris Stamper wondered that if you had four view ports on screen so you could see what others were doing, how could it possibly be fun?!"



Initially, the intention was to do a 2D side-scrolling platformer for the SNES, a genre that Rare excelled in after the seminal *Donkey Kong Country*, but Hollis insisted the game should be in 3D and produced for Nintendo's enigmatic Ultra 64, which was still in development. He also made explicit his design model: Sega's lightgun arcade hit *Virtua Cop*.

Karl: "When I got involved, the first thing I did was model the gas plant. We put a spline (sic) through the level so you could follow a route like in *Virtua Cop*, but it didn't go further than that. We decided to take it off the rails. Some of those early builds had bits missing because you'd never be able to see them and I remember going back and filling in the holes."

GoldenEye was forging its own path, a departure from the Rare games that had gone before. When you consider that this was the first project for eight of the nine team members, that was perhaps to be expected. They may have been inexperienced, but they were unfettered by expectations of what a game could and couldn't be. They turned naivety into ambition and the enforced isolation of this happy band – "Rare organised teams into separate barns and you only had keys to your particular cell block," quips Dave – meant that the newbies on the team had to find their own way.

"Because it was most people's first game," explains Graeme Norgate, "we did things we might not do again because it was too much work. We didn't take the easy route. If something sounded like a good idea, it was like, 'Yeah let's do it!' The world was our oyster! Only afterwards would you find it was a world of pain."

At least it was a world of their own making. "It was untrammelled by arseholes," explains Dave. "Nowadays, publishers get people who don't know about games to run projects. We hadn't worked on a game before but the difference was we were having to do the work. Our wish-list of features would be things we knew would be good and we could do. There was some smart hiring and cherry-picking of people. We all had ambition and were hardworking. That's how he managed to get that much content out of us."

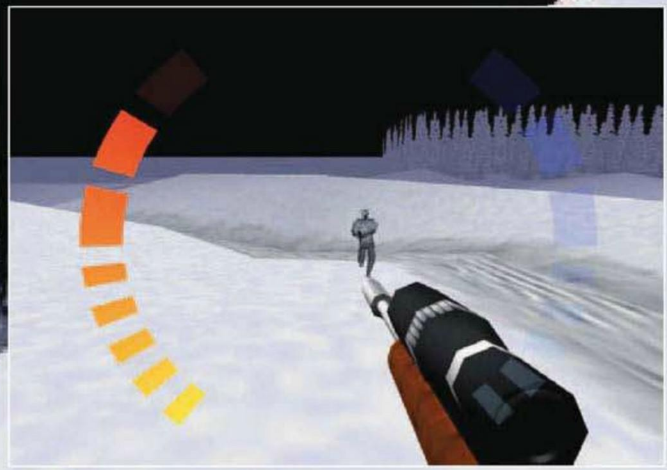
> "'GOLDENEYE'S NOT YOUR UNIVERSITY PROJECT' TIM STAMPER TOLD US ONE DAY! AS HEADS OF RARE, THE STAMPERS PROBABLY HAD TO MAKE A LOT OF EXCUSES" STEVE ELLIS ON WHY THE GAME APPEARED TWO YEARS AFTER THE FILM

Martin also encouraged the team to draw on their love of the *Bond* films they'd grown up with. He recognised the inherent appeal of playing as the suave hero who had defined cool for so many aspiring young agents over the preceding decades. No longer would you simply be a floating gun as in *Doom*. Now you were England's deadliest weapon.

Karl: "I remember the first time we got Bond's hand in with the watch. We



» Limited shooting and careful movement enabled you to make your way stealthily through many levels.



» The sniper rifle, a joy to use and essential for getting the drop on the enemy.

scanned it in and modelled it up and it had the cuff of the white tuxedo. I thought, 'Hey, I'm James Bond!' And then we put that thing in where the camera flies into the back of Bond's head at the start of a level. It tied you in."

A key part of that appeal was the infamous Licence to Kill. *GoldenEye* was a first-person shooter of course, but the decision to recognise body-specific hits introduced a new subtlety to the genre. Shoot a guard in the leg and he reacts differently to if you blasted him in the chest. Each part of the body was given a weighting, expressed as a fraction. Hit a limb or the torso and your enemy would be pushed closer to a damage count of one and death. Or you could go straight for the head. A bullet in the brain equalled one. Instant death. One-shot kills.

Headshots were not only disturbingly satisfying, though, they created a whole new way to play. Dave explains: "The way detection worked was very simple but fundamentally changed the set-up. Whenever you fired a gun, it had a radius test and alerted the non-player characters within that radius. If you fired the same gun again within a certain amount of time, it did a larger radius test and I think there was a third even larger radius after that. It meant if you found one guy and shot him in the head and then didn't fire again, the timer would reset. It wasn't realistic but it meant the less you shot, the quieter you were, the less enemies came after you. If an NPC that hadn't been drawn and was just standing in a room waiting was alerted by gunfire, it would duplicate itself and one went to investigate. You can see it happening sometimes – if you go to the right place and make a noise, you see more enemies spawning."

Stay hidden, keep quiet, make every shot count… almost inadvertently, the team had invented stealth gaming. Of course, you could still go in all guns blazing, but once players got to grips with the sniper rifle and realised that enemies had distinct blind spots to exploit – they could only 'see' you if they could walk to you in a straight line, meaning you could peer out from behind cover or line up a fatal headshot through windows – the sneaky approach was not only appealing, it was vital in successfully completing many of the game's trickier missions. It was a surreptitious tactic that emerged naturally, rather than being pre-determined.

Karl: "When we had plenty of film material, we tried to stick to it for authenticity but we weren't afraid of adding to it to help the game design. It was very organic. Dave would come in and say he needed an extra door and a room somewhere and we'd add it in. Back then, it was so much quicker. It'd be half a day's work to add in a new corridor and a room."

This sense of freedom to try new things, to experiment with level design, play it exhaustively and let the experience determine what direction development would go was crucial to how the team worked. They weren't enslaved to a rigid design document, meaning everyone could contribute to game design. Nothing was set in stone. Not even the hardware.

Considering how the finished *GoldenEye* feels so suited to the N64, it's easy to forget the machine didn't exist for the first year and a half of its development. The team was using SGI Onyxs, hugely expensive Silicon Graphics machines, guessing at what the specs of Nintendo's new console might be and using a butchered Saturn controller to playtest. As it turned out, when they finally received the finished console they were pleasantly relieved. Despite costing a fraction of the SG workstations, fortunately Nintendo had come good on most of its promises. "The processor ended up being three quarters of what they had told us", explains Steve. "We had to cut the textures down by half."

M SPEAKS

We managed to catch a word with the man responsible for overseeing the *GoldenEye* project, Martin Hollis. So, having assembled his team, were they a handful to manage? "That's a cheeky question," replies Martin, "and I like it. I'm not a terribly dictatorial manager. Oh they were fabulous because we all fitted together so well. We did have a shared vision, which happened naturally and everyone knew what *Bond* was about which helped us to get there. So no, they weren't difficult to manage. Now if you asked my management about me, they might tell a different story…"

Martin continued to lead the team as they began work on *Perfect Dark*, but left Rare in 1998 to set up his own company, Zoonami. Visit its website www.zoonami.com for a transcript of the fascinating speech he gave at the European Developers Forum in 2004 on the making of *GoldenEye* plus details of the company's recently released game, *Zendoku*. "Think Sudoku meets ninjas," he says helpfully. Martin's favourite Bond girl is Jane Seymour and he assures us he could have triumphed over his former colleagues if he'd been part of the developer deathmatch and we've convinced him to be a future castaway for *Desert Island Discs*. Result.



FREE AT LAST

While *GoldenEye* was instrumental in popularising the console FPS and introduced a myriad of new ideas to the genre, the game has a very tangible legacy to those that worked on it. Steve: "Free Radical Design was set up on the back of *GoldenEye*. It led us to signing a deal in the first place. It opened doors for us to do what we've gone on to do." Free Radical Design has gone on to become a major creative force in FPS development, producing the *TimeSplitters* series and the recently released *Haze* for PlayStation 3. Success has seen the Nottingham-based company grow enormously and with 160 employees and relationships with publishers such as EA, Ubisoft and LucasArts, have the boys ever considered going back to the *Bond* franchise? Karl: "It's been suggested at times by people, but publishers have to pay so much for the *Bond* licence it puts them off. Actually, it would be good to do *GoldenEye* again with new technology and do things we wanted to first time." Before we all get too excited, though, he adds: "If FRD did a *Bond* game I'm sure it would be good, but there's no *GoldenEye* magic dust you can sprinkle on."

Unfortunate, but not a disaster. And they coped with the reduction in admirable retro fashion. "A lot of *GoldenEye* is in black and white", admits Karl, rather surprisingly. "RGB colour textures cost a lot more in terms of processing power. You could do double the resolution if you used greyscale, so a lot was done like that. If I needed a bit of colour, I'd add it in the vertex."

As their semi-colourful *Bond* world was taking shape on the small screen, the film it was based on was nearing completion. The team had received the script very early in development and visited the set at Leavesden Studios, housed in an old Rolls Royce factory, half a dozen times. "We had really good access", says Karl. "We could walk anywhere and photograph what we needed. After the first few visits, I realised we needed textures. I started taking photos of walls!"

Visiting the filmset undoubtedly helped cement the game world in the minds of the team, but it also reminded Rare that the clock was ticking. While trying to release the game in tandem with the film had never been considered a viable proposition, the thought of it not appearing until the next *Bond* movie hit cinemas instilled an understandable sense of urgency.

Steve: "'It's not your university project' Tim Stamper told us one day! As heads of Rare, the Stampers probably had to make a lot of excuses. That's what we have to do these days. Why isn't it out yet? Why is it crap? We never had to answer those!"

Perhaps the Stamper Brothers' greatest contribution to *GoldenEye* was fending off such enquiries and allowing the team time to develop a 3D game in what were still uncharted waters. Being able to play *Mario 64* on the new console was a key influence.

Dave: "When *Mario* arrived it was clearly a step forward. Martin was obsessed with the collision detection, which was obviously doing it in 3D and *GoldenEye* was essentially using a 2D method. And our story was only about shooting stuff – we needed other things. We started putting in objectives, like meeting people in a level and back then that involved some complicated AI. Finding Boris, guiding him through and making him decode something… that wasn't easy! Other levels, you could hear the barrel being scraped – collect five arbitrary pieces and go here, but *Mario* had plenty of that shit, which is pretty boring. We punctuated it with stuff like go and blow this thing up! Like the canisters at the end of Arkhangelsk. It's in the film and we could have just said go here and press X – Karl had built that in the background but it wasn't going to explode. But wouldn't it be nice if it did? So the canisters became a 'prop'. A bloody big prop. And the explosion had to be big enough to mask you switching one object with another. But then if it's a gas plant, shouldn't we have gas? We can't do f*cking gas, but we have got fog… maybe we could change the fog settings? Can we use that more than once? Maybe in the Egypt setting?"

For a game with more than its fair share of wanton destruction, the team became remarkably good at recycling. The radar on multiplayer mode is actually an oil drum texture, which explains the cloudiness on the right, and sometimes whole levels were created with the detritus they had to hand.

Karl: "As the engine got better, we were very good at reusing things. We decided we'd do the meeting room from *Moonraker,* which I just loved. We couldn't do it round, that was just too expensive, but we did a square version and linked it with being under the shuttle. Dave said those chairs just have got to fold down like in the film so we did it with door code. I remember one chair always folded wrong, but it would have taken so much coding to get it right, it was like, hey, leave it as a bug! The shuttle was made from reused satellite textures and to make it take off, we used grenade explosions. That whole level is a big hack job, but it's one of the nicest looking."

GoldenEye was always good at giving you the big picture, from the dramatic bungee jump down Byelomorye dam at the opening to the final shoot out on the Antenna Cradle, but much of its enduring charm



» Ahh, the beauty of the doorway. It provides a perfect bottleneck to take out enemies.



» (From left to right) Karl, Steve and Graham were more than happy to revisit *GoldenEye's* multiplayer when *Retro Gamer* turned up with its N64.



» Here's the man himself, tuxedo noticeably absent.

is in the detail. Bullet holes in glass, graceful forward rolls, hats being blown off heads and the knocking knees of terrified scientists.

"Those are Duncan Botwood's knees", laughs Karl. "He wasn't a professional actor, he was one of the team! There was only one big motion-capture shoot and we realised someone was going to surrender at some point, so it was, 'Put your hands up and shake your knees'. Then it would be, 'Stand there and we'll push you over'. I think we must have breached Health and Safety quite a lot…"

Graeme: "Duncan's line was, 'I had to die a million times for *GoldenEye*'. There were plenty of times when we'd get him to close his eyes and he didn't know when he was going to be pushed. He went through a lot for the game. There was blood."

It wasn't the only occasion when the nearest warm body was put to good use. Alongside the faces of Pierce Brosnan, Robbie Coltrane et al, Bea Jones scanned in virtually all the staff at Rare. At the start of each level, five faces from the extensive collection are picked at random and plonked on the bodies of your adversaries. All the development team are in there and Karl remains rather proud of the manly scar added to his own mug. More cameos were to follow, explains Steve.

"There are a few monitors in the game – one has Dave in sunglasses and a Russian hat Karl had bought in Berlin, there's one with Mark in a bowler hat on a skateboard and another has Karl doing a Python silly walk. We were just trying to make the monitors seem alive."

A notable omission are the Stamper Brothers, who declined the opportunity to have their faces featured in the game, perhaps wary of giving employees the chance to shoot their bosses at close range. But the brothers' faith in the project, protecting the team from outside interference and giving them the space to produce the best game they possibly could, means they can hold their heads high. So many of the things that make *GoldenEye* special – the bonus Aztec and Egyptian levels, the AI that sees guards dashing for alarms and the wonderful multiplayer mode (see boxout) – were the result of not having to rush out a product to meet a demoralising deadline.

Steve: "The reason it turned out so well is that no one was standing over you saying you don't need to do that, move on to the next bit. I was on the explosions for a month and I didn't have someone telling me I'd had a week and that was enough. If there had been, the game might have been out on time…"

But it wouldn't have been the game it turned out to be. The entire team flew out to E3 in 1997 to present a 99 per cent complete version of *GoldenEye* and while the game was well received, no one predicted the phenomenal success that followed. A staggering 8 million copies were sold worldwide and it remains the biggest selling N64 game in the USA, outdoing *Mario 64*, *Ocarina Of Time* and *Mario Kart*. "Actually, I was concerned it wouldn't be able to compete with *Turok*," admits Karl. "That looked better and had a better frame rate… and dinosaurs!"

Laughter all round and an appropriate juncture for the team to pick up their pads and revisit the game that marked their entry into the industry. As Steve plays through the opening level, memories are triggered like sticky mines. How Martin had done a 3D gun barrel that had to be dropped due to frame rate issues; how code had been written to let you drive the van, but it caused too many problems if you got the vehicle stuck in a dead end; how the unreachable island you can see far in the distance from atop the dam originally had a solitary guard patrolling it; how they'd had to label certain wall textures as 'floor' so guards could 'see' you,



» The name's Bond… James Bond.

which meant they would occasionally leap out of bunkers inexplicably. "At one point, we were going to have reloading done by the player unplugging and re-inserting the rumble pack on the controller," remembers Steve. "Nintendo weren't keen on that idea and I think it might have affected the pacing a bit…"

So to the main event – a ten-minute deathmatch – and as our four agents trade headshots and insults, they start to reel off the things *GoldenEye* pioneered. The sniper rifle, the gun disconnected from the camera, the civilian AI, the 3D explosions, the environment mapping (look closely at a shiny surface and you'll notice a low resolution reflection of your surroundings), body-specific hit reactions and the tasty option of dual-wielding weapons. "Didn't *Halo 2* invent that seven years later?" chuckles Karl. The list goes on, yet more fundamentally, they proved that a story-driven FPS, a genre previously confined to PCs, could triumph on a console. Countless others have followed, but *GoldenEye* remains a benchmark.

And the winner? Appropriately enough, Steve, the creator of the multiplayer mode, nicks it by a single kill. Then the defeated trio realise he's been playing as Oddjob, whose diminutive stature bestows a distinct advantage and the room echoes with cries of cheat and demands for a rematch.

GoldenEye: still inflaming passions ten years on.



» Dave Doak discovers that he still has that multiplayer magic. Just not enough to beat Steve Ellis.

"FOR THE MOTION CAPTURE, WE'D GET DUNCAN TO CLOSE HIS EYES AND HE DIDN'T KNOW WHEN HE WAS GOING TO BE PUSHED. HE WENT THROUGH A LOT FOR THE GAME. THERE WAS BLOOD" GRAEME NORGATE ON WHY THOSE GUARDS LOOK LIKE THEY'RE REALLY FEELING IT

遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

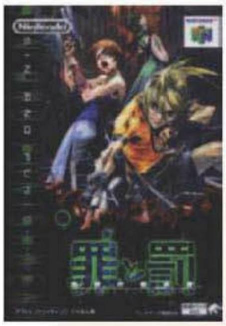
FULL OF EASTERN

NOT BY DOSTOEVSKY

SIN AND PUNISHMENT: SUCCESSOR TO THE EARTH

There's so much more to Japanese gaming than date simulators and impenetrable Mahjong titles. This month we look at Sin And Punishment, Treasure's N64 epic that sadly never made it to UK soil

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ESP
» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** N64
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30+ (1,200 POINTS VIRTUAL CONSOLE)
» **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:** *PANZER DRAGOON ZWEI*

While the original *Panzer Dragoon* was a visual delight, Team Andromeda really upped the ante on its superb sequel. Like *Sin And Punishment*, *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* featured an incredible amount of inventiveness, gorgeous visuals, striking sound and terrifying end of level bosses. Best of all, it shouldn't cost you more than a tenner, so go look for it.





Interesting fact
After much clamouring from fans, Treasure's superb shoot-'em-up is now available on the Wii's Virtual Console service. It costs a hefty 1,200 points (around £8) but the enhanced graphics and excellent gameplay quickly makes up for the higher price. Download it now and love it forever.



» We were going to video record this stunning level for the coverdisc, then we realised we no longer made one. Doh!

メガ駆動機構

If there was any justice left in the world Busted would have never been allowed near instruments, George Lucas would have been strung up for tinkering with his original *Star Wars* trilogy and Treasure's superb *Sin And Punishment* would be heralded as one of the greatest N64 games ever made.

Playing *Sin And Punishment* for the first time is akin to witnessing a miracle unfolding before your eyes. It's like watching a child being born into the world – it's a moment that will stay with you forever.

Indeed, *Sin And Punishment* (or *Tsumi To Batsu – Chikyuu No Keishousha* to give it its full Japanese name) is an utterly superb blaster, and some six years after its release it remains within the upper echelons of N64 hits and has become yet another feather in Treasure's painfully overloaded cap.

Super Mario 64 may have been a three-dimensional stroke of genius, and Link's first 3D adventure rightly deserved every accolade that was bestowed upon it, but in our minds Treasure's magical opus is every bit as important and deserves just as much praise as its better known peers – even if it is just an on-rails shoot-'em-up.

To say *Sin And Punishment* was an aesthetic delight is an understatement of the highest degree; even today its jaw-dropping visuals and pulsating soundtrack will leave you giddy and make you wonder just how on Earth Treasure actually managed to make the N64 look just so damn good. Sure, the smear-o-vision that all N64 games were unfortunately prone to suffer from is still present and correct, but even poor output can't hide the majesty of Treasure's sumptuous shooter. *Wave Race* may have boasted sublime water physics that allowed


» One of the later stages sees you donning a huge suit and taking on one big-ass boss in the spectacular end of stage battle.


» When this girl gets bored of hurling soldiers at you, she'll start flinging bloody great pieces of metal. Careful now.


» She may not look all that but wait until you see her in motion.

you to practically feel every bump and swell, and *Lylat Wars* perfectly captured the atmosphere of Lucas's aforementioned space opera, but nothing sung on the N64 like *Sin And Punishment*. As it had done with Sega's Mega Drive and Saturn, Treasure (with a little help from Nintendo's R&D) pushed the N64 to its limits and delivered some of the most astounding visuals to ever grace the machine. From the very moment your character races into the screen and starts destroying enemies with gay abandonment, the action doesn't back down for a second. *Sin And Punishment* races along at a blindingly smooth pace and never falters in its efforts to amaze and astound.

Spectacular explosions fill the screen, impressive lighting effects showcase Treasure's fantastic levels and stage design, while the many bosses that are thrown at you will cause your jaw to drop. If *Sin And Punishment* can be summed up in one stage, though, it has to be the gravity-defying aircraft carrier level. Floating around on a huge piece of metal, your on-screen persona mows down wave after wave of enemies while the level constantly spins around him; it's an absolutely stunning effect and will make you question if you're actually playing a N64 game – it really is that good. Of course, all this technical wizardry came at a price, and the only downside to *Sin And Punishment* is that everything features a very low poly count and can look basic. It was a tricky choice that Treasure obviously had to make (detail over smoothness) but it made the right decision. And besides, there's so many spectacular effects going on you won't really notice anyway.



» Weave your way through the bullets and fill that boss with hot plasma.

For all its graphical splendour, *Sin And Punishment*'s gameplay, while simple, was no less impressive and made full use of the N64's ergonomically designed controller. Aiming was handled via the analogue stick, while the Z-trigger was used to fire (or doubled up as a handy sword if an enemy strayed to close too you). Due to its on-rails nature, character movement was handled by the left and right C buttons, while a double tap of said buttons enabled you to execute a nifty roll – very handy for getting out of tight situations. It was also possible to jump or double jump and Treasure had also included an option for either left or right-handed players. The intuitive control system enabled you to quickly grasp the controls and simply get down to creating as much on-screen carnage as possible. While Treasure had included a reasonable plot and decent voice acting (all in English) it was the inventive gameplay, level design and subsequent replay value that proved to be *Sin And Punishment's* real draw.

Despite its restrictiveness, Treasure's game gave you the impression of being far more open than it was and variety was used to ensure that you never got bored enough to question the linear levels that you were racing through. As a result, boss encounters featured heavily throughout *Sin And Punishment*'s short running time (it can be bested in a few hours) and each and every battle was a joy to play, even if they did give a sly wink to past Treasure titles. It didn't matter though, Treasure has invigorated *Sin And Punishment* with the sort of instant accessibility that had once been seen in the likes of *Space Harrier* and *After Burner* and while the game itself was far from original, it had been created with such obvious excitement that you couldn't help but fall in love with it. Six years later and the relationship is still going strong.



PALACE SOFTWARE



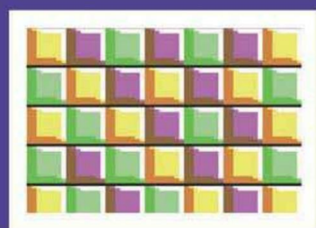














BARBARIANS, SACRED ARMOUR AND THE EVIL DEAD – WELCOME TO PALACE SOFTWARE...







Mention Palace Software and most people think of Barbarian and the controversial marketing campaign featuring glamour model Maria Whittaker in a tiny bikini. But behind the headlines was a company with a small but significant catalogue of games. Martyn Carroll talks to the founders to find out exactly what went on…



» "Ban this sick filth!" screamed self-appointed moral guardians when the *Barbarian* advert first appeared in print.

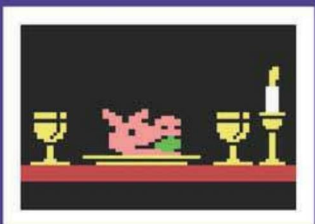
You could say that Peter Stone and Richard Leinfellner have done alright for themselves. Since the pair formed Palace Software in 1983, they've both carved out successful careers in the UK games industry. Stone is currently General Manager of Konami UK, no less, while Leinfellner is a Vice President and Executive Producer at Electronic Arts. It's all very impressive, even more so when you discover that they stumbled across the wonderful world of gaming almost by chance.

In the early Eighties Peter was involved in the booming home video market. He left London's Virgin Megastore to become manager of The Video Palace, a popular video shop on Kensington High Street owned by the Palace group. Richard worked there as a sales assistant to help pay his way through university. As a sideline The Video Palace began to sell computer games, both in the store and via mail order. Richard helped by reviewing the new games for their sales catalogue. And then something very interesting happened.

"Kids started to come into the store with programs they'd made and wanted to sell them," says Stone. "They'd record them on blank cassettes or disks with their own handwritten labels, and we'd buy them."

It wasn't just kids either. Leinfellner remembers that Jeff Minter's mum used to stop by and drop off boxes of her son's games, presumably while he was back home in Hampshire putting the finishing touches to his latest llama-themed epic.

"As the months went on," continues Stone, "we started to make contact with companies who were producing games professionally and the business started to build up. Richard and I had the idea of actually making games ourselves, and that's when the idea for Palace Software was born."



A NASTY PLAN

Peter went to Palace boss Nik Powell with the plan and he was happy to fund the venture. As a subsidiary of the Palace group, Nik would have a say in everything, but being part of the group had its benefits. For a start, Palace had an off-site tape archive room at London's Scala Cinema which Peter and Richard were allowed to use as an office for free. More importantly, Palace Home Video owned the rental rights to a certain low-budget horror film that was all over the headlines.

The release of *The Evil Dead* movie would have probably passed without note were it not for the introduction of the Video Recordings Act in 1984. The Act stated that all videos made available in the UK must be classified by the Government before they could be legally distributed. However, a number of horror movies were deemed too extreme to receive the new '18' rating and they were effectively banned. And topping the list of so-called 'video nasties' was *The Evil Dead*.

The furore that followed played straight into Palace's hands. The film may have been banned, but the Act specifically stated that computer games were exempt from classification. Palace obtained the videogame rights to the film and Richard and Peter began to bang out the game for the Commodore 64 (with Spectrum and BBC Micro ports to follow). Meanwhile, *The Evil Dead* hysteria showed no signs of dying down.

"One day we were raided by the Obscene Publications Squad to confiscate *The Evil Dead* video masters!" laughs Leinfellner. "We had to convince them we had nothing to do with the tape archive, even though I was writing *The Evil Dead* game at the time."

Home Office hassles were the least of their worries, however, as the pair struggled to manage the project. "The game was my first programming effort and it was very poor," admits Leinfellner. "Pete did all the graphics, even entering the code in hex. We didn't even have the game to show at the lavish launch party at the London Dungeon because I was running late." And *The Evil Dead* curse was to strike yet again. "On the way from delivering the game master to the duplicators I was knocked off my motor bike and broke my wrist," he winces.

"We were totally naive," adds Stone. "It was almost like an experiment where we were finding out how not to make a game. We pretty much made every possible mistake,





» **Top:** Palace co-founder Peter Stone. "That big moustache I had in those days was my trademark in the industry!" he laughs. **Bottom:** Palace's other main man, Richard Leinfellner. Richard started out as a programmer before taking on more responsibility as a producer.

IN THE KNOW

In brief: Palace Software was formed in 1983 by Peter Stone and Richard Leinfellner while they were working together in a London video shop. The company's debut was a low-key release based on Sam Raimi's horror film *The Evil Dead*, but Palace achieved notable success with the *Cauldron* and *Barbarian* games. Palace went on to publish a number of titles for other developers, including Sensible Software and Delphine, before being absorbed into Titus Software in 1991.

PALACE SOFTWARE

PUBLISHING PALACE

Towards the end of the Eighties, Palace's focus shifted more towards the publishing side of the software business. According to Leinfellner, this made perfect sense as the company had already established strong sales and distribution channels throughout the UK and Europe. "We decided to use the facilities we'd built up to help cover our overheads. We started to talk to other developers and proposed to them that we'd sell their games. We were already working with outside developers such as The RamJam Corporation and Binary Vision and we thought we'd wrap all such future projects under a new brand – Outlaw Productions."

The first release published on the new label was Sensible Software's *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* for the Commodore 64. This game-making utility sold very well and opened the gates for more titles to be released on the Outlaw label, including *Troll*, *Cosmic Pirate* and *International 3D Tennis*. In 1989 Palace published *Bio Challenge* and *Future Wars*, both by Delphine, on the Atari ST and Amiga in Europe.







» **Clockwise:** Collecting an award from French magazine *Tilt*: Peter Stone, Matthew Timms, Steve Brown and Stanley Schembri. » It's not all work, work, work… Peter and the Palace staff enjoying a game of *Exploding Fist*. » Mike, Steve and Maria fooling around on the *Barbarian 2* photo shoot.

"BARBARIAN IS BEST REMEMBERED FOR ITS VIOLENT SWORDPLAY AND SUN 'STUNNA' MARIA WHITTAKER"

but we were learning from those mistakes. By doing it we could then see the direction we should be going in. We realised that we needed to get some good artists on board and put more effort into the design of the game."

SEASON OF THE WITCH

Following the release of *The Evil Dead*, Palace Software hired Steve Brown and Stanley Schembri. Steve was an artist and designer while Stanley was a programmer employed to assist Richard on coding duties. With the new staff in place, they began work on their next release.

Palace had acquired the rights to the *Halloween* films, so Steve Brown's first job was to design a tie-in game. "I worked on concepts and designs," he says, "but a tiny eight-pixel high Michael Myers trundling around the screen with a kitchen knife just didn't make much of a game. However, the pumpkins I'd drawn looked really cool and gave me the idea to take the game in a completely different direction."

With the fantasy theme in place, Steve and Richard began to discuss how the game would play. "We were having a chat," says Leinfellner, and Steve asked me 'How come games are either scrolling or platform?' I told him there was really no technical reason so I wrote an engine which did both."

The game was christened *Cauldron* and saw you playing as the Witch Queen, flying over a scrolling landscape on your broomstick before descending into the various flip-screen tombs beneath the ground. Released in early 1985, *Cauldron* was an instant hit on the Commodore 64. It was reviewed in the first issue of *Zzap!64* magazine and received 87% and a Sizzler award, beginning Palace's excellent relationship with the gaming press. Spectrum and Amstrad versions of *Cauldron* followed as well as a sequel the following year subtitled *The Pumpkin Strikes Back*.

By this point, most of the coding was done by Stanley. "I had to give up programming as the team grew," says Leinfellner. "Stan did the bulk of the coding later on. I still helped debug stuff and did things like AI design, but it's fair to say that I was more of a producer after *Cauldron*."

The company ended 1986 on a high with the release of *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*, a colourful platform adventure which benefited greatly from the artwork of new recruit Dan Malone (Dan was hired to take some of the pressure off Steve). Steve, meanwhile, was busy designing what would become Palace's most successful game ever.

CLONIN' THE BARBARIAN

Following the success of the *Cauldron* games, Brown was given a free rein to start working on pretty much any game he wanted. "Being a big fan of Frank Frazetta's paintings, I wanted to do a sword fighting game and make it as brutal and as realistic as possible," he says. "I built a couple of wooden swords and practised the 16 moves that I had in mind, then filmed the results and used the video as reference for the game. The spinning propeller move – which I borrowed from *Conan The Destroyer* – took forever to figure out and nearly took my eye out…"

Titled simply *Barbarian*, this one-on-one fighter featured large character graphics and surprisingly deep combat for the time, but it's best remembered for its violent swordplay (the infamous 'head chop' move in particular) and its publicity campaign featuring Sun 'stunna' Maria Whittaker. Back when gaming was still largely perceived as a child's pastime, this harmless bit of titillation was seen as tasteless in some quarters. In a letter to *Electron User* magazine, which ran the advert on its back cover, the secretary of the West Midlands Assemblies of God Churches said the image was "offensive and particularly insulting to women". Another reader called it an "ugly pornographic advertisement".

"Getting Maria Whittaker involved was very much Steve's idea," reveals Leinfellner, "and it was a great idea. It did wonders for sales and PR. The controversy it caused was all a bit hypocritical really as it was much tamer then Page 3."

"I thought the majority of game artwork at that time was pretty poor," says Brown. "It occurred to me that creating some iconic



FINEST HOUR

BARBARIAN

Palace's most popular game needs little introduction. It graced just about every home computer format of the day, received rave reviews from the gaming press, and stirred up a whole heap of sales-boosting scandal. But at heart *Barbarian* was a fantastic fighting game. Our only regret is that the little pot-bellied goblin who booted your severed head off the screen didn't get to star in his own game.

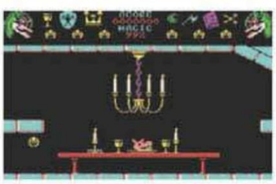
GAMES REVIEWS



CAULDRON

PALACE SOFTWARE (1985)

» With brilliantly colourful graphics courtesy of Steve Brown and gameplay that effectively mixed arcade action with adventure, *Cauldron* is up there with the best of Ultimate's 2D games. It was very hard, however, and anyone who successfully managed to collect all the required items and defeat the evil Pumpkin without cheating was a god among gamers. The C64 version was the best. **92%**



CAULDRON II

PALACE SOFTWARE (1986)

» The sequel took the winning formula and turned it on its head. Playing as the Pumpkin guardian from the first game, you had to bounce your bonce around the Witch Queen's castle, collecting various items. The emphasis was on exploration, as the castle was huge, but the clumsy control system and uncompromising difficulty level quickly led to frustration. The title screen music was excellent, however. **82%**



SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD

PALACE SOFTWARE (1986)

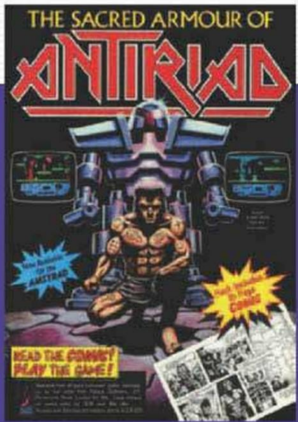
» By this point Palace had gained a reputation for developing great looking games with superb animation, and *Antiriad* continued this fine tradition. Thankfully, the game was a damn sight easier than the *Cauldron* titles, so mere mortals had a chance of actually finding the special suit of the title and destroying the alien threat. Rather laughably, the game was released in the US by Epyx as *Rad Warrior*. **89%**



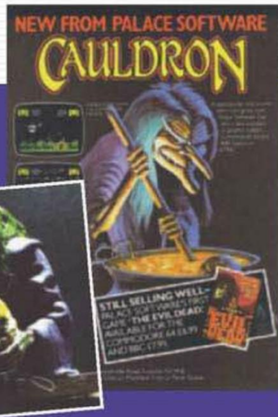
STIFFLIP AND CO.

BINARY VISION (1987)

» Following its arcade adventure games, this was a complete change of pace for Palace. Written by Binary Vision, *Stifflip* was an icon-driven escapade that mashed together adventure elements, arcade interludes and a bizarre plot involving mad professors, a dastardly count and some kind of depraved ray gun which threatened to undermine moral standards and lead to the collapse of the post-WW1 British Empire. **68%**



» *Antiriad* came with a free 16-page scene-setting comic written and drawn by Dan Malone.





» Steve Brown actually sculpted models of the Witch Queen on which to base his cover art paintings.

fantasy imagery with real people would be a great hook for the publicity campaign." As you'd perhaps imagine, Steve has some fond memories of the actual shoot. "The chain of Maria's bikini snapped a number of times during the photo shoot in true *Carry On* fashion and I spent a lot of time running back and forth with pliers, squeezing the links back together." Well it's a dirty job…

1988 was a pivotal year for Palace. While *Barbarian* had been a hit, in-house development continued at a steady pace with the release of *Barbarian II* and *Rimrunner*. In a bid to expand beyond the core development team, the company began to ramp up its role as a publisher of other developers' titles. Over the next three years, Palace published games from Sensible Software, Denton Designs, Delphine and others. But this expansion created problems of its own. "As the company really grew, we made some bad hiring and game publishing choices to support the growth," says Leinfellner. "I felt that it lost something that we had in the early days. I spent all my days in meetings and nothing ever seemed to get done. I think as we spread our focus the quality of the output suffered."

Richard became despondent and left to set up his own software company, IDS. In hindsight, his decision to move on seemed to be the right one, as in 1991 the Palace Group decided to sell off several of its subsidiaries including Palace Software.

"The Palace group was getting more and more into movie production and that involved big money," explains Leinfellner, "so it decided to sell off various companies in the group. We were sold to the French company Titus and Palace Software effectively became the UK office of Titus. Some of the Palace staff left while others stayed on at Titus. Several games were in development at the time of the takeover but all of those were scrapped and never saw the light of day."

RETROSPECTION

Stone stayed on at Titus for 12 months before leaving to join Konami in 1992. Looking back at his time at Palace, we wondered if he had any personal regrets? "We should have spent a lot more effort in building up a team," he says on reflection. "We had the core of a very talented team, and for the time we made some great games. But had we taken the time to build up a bigger team I think we could have been a very successful company." When asked the same question, Leinfellner singles out the company's reluctance to support consoles. "I wished that Steve Brown and I had spent more time convincing the backers to put *Cauldron* and *Barbarian* on to Nintendo's SNES. These games were perfect for the platform and the market. I think it would have transformed Palace's declining fortunes."

Leinfellner reveals that Palace actually attempted to license some games to the Nintendo consoles. "We didn't really have enough understanding of the Japanese and American markets", he concedes. "Maybe if we'd managed to get those games released things could have been very different."

"THIS HARMLESS BIT OF TITILLATION WAS SEEN AS TASTELESS IN SOME QUARTERS"

BARBARIAN III

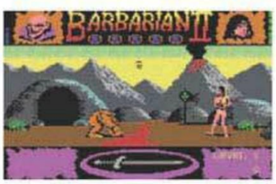


» Beefy male model? Check. Busty female model? Check. Horrible slime creature? Check. This concept cover art for *Barbarian III* was ticking all the right boxes.

Barbarian was such a huge hit, particularly in Europe, that Palace planned a string of sequels. Even before *Barbarian II* was released, *Your Sinclair* magazine ran a competition in which readers were invited to send in drawings of ghastly horrible monsters, with the winner getting their monster featured in *Barbarian III*. Over the next two years the game was mentioned in various magazines but no finished product ever emerged.

So what happened to *Barbarian*'s third outing? "The basic concept and design was done and it was shaping up to be fantastic," reveals Brown. "It was to feature huge figures, monsters, grisly deaths, great gags, full-on sword combat…"

Unfortunately before the game could be fully released Palace was sold to Titus and the sequel was canned. This was a shame, as Steve had some spicy publicity already planned out. "I had arranged to have a 15-foot section of tentacle made at Pinewood studios. My other favourite buxom page three model, Debee Ashby, was going to be lifted in the air by a disgusting tentacle monster as Barb hacked away with his axe…"



BARBARIAN II
PALACE SOFTWARE (1988)

» Another memorable Maria Whittaker advertising campaign masked a hugely disappointing sequel. In following the *Fist 2* route and introducing adventure elements, *Barbarian II* messed up almost everything that was great about the first game. Choosing to play as either Barbarian or Princess Mariana, you traipsed around maze-like locations defeating weird monsters on your quest to defeat the evil Drax. **57%**



RIMRUNNER
PALACE SOFTWARE (1988)

» Palace repaid faithful C64 fans with this exclusive title for the old beige breadbin – although a Spectrum version was planned but never released. Perhaps the poor Speccy just wasn't up to the job, because the game was a graphical showcase, exhibiting silky-smooth animation and parallax scrolling. Sadly there was little substance to match this style. Technically impressive but as hollow as hell. **71%**



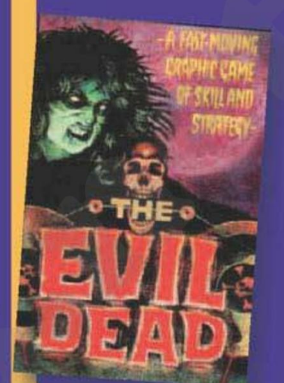
SWAP
MICROIDS (1991)

» The success of *Tetris*, particularly on the Game Boy, saw developers rushing to make puzzle games. *Swap* was one of the better examples in that it was easy to get into but difficult to put down. The player was presented with a board of coloured shapes and you had to swap the shapes around so that the colours matched up and they disappeared from play. Intelligent, absorbing, and a world away from Palace's earlier games. **84%**



DEMONIAK
PALACE SOFTWARE (1991)

» One of Palace's last releases skipped 8-bit machines, appearing on Amiga, ST and PC. Written by Alan Grant, whose name had graced a number of comic books, *Demoniak* tried to thrust the text adventure genre into the Nineties with the Pure Fiction system. This allowed the game to jump the linear rails on which text adventures traditionally ran, providing the player with unprecedented levels of freedom. **75%**





AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

THE EVIL DEAD

Palace's first game is far from its finest hour. The simple graphics, blip-blip sound and repetitive gameplay are all fairly indicative of the time, so it does at least possess (no pun intended) a certain charm. Playing as Ash, Bruce Campbell's character from the film, you had to run around the cabin constantly shutting the doors and windows in a bid to keep the curse out. Unlike the film, it was neither gory nor fun.



THE TRAP DOOR

THERE IS SOMETHING DOWN THERE...



- » **PUBLISHER:** PIRANHA
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** GRAPHIC ADVENTURE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** LESS THAN A QUID

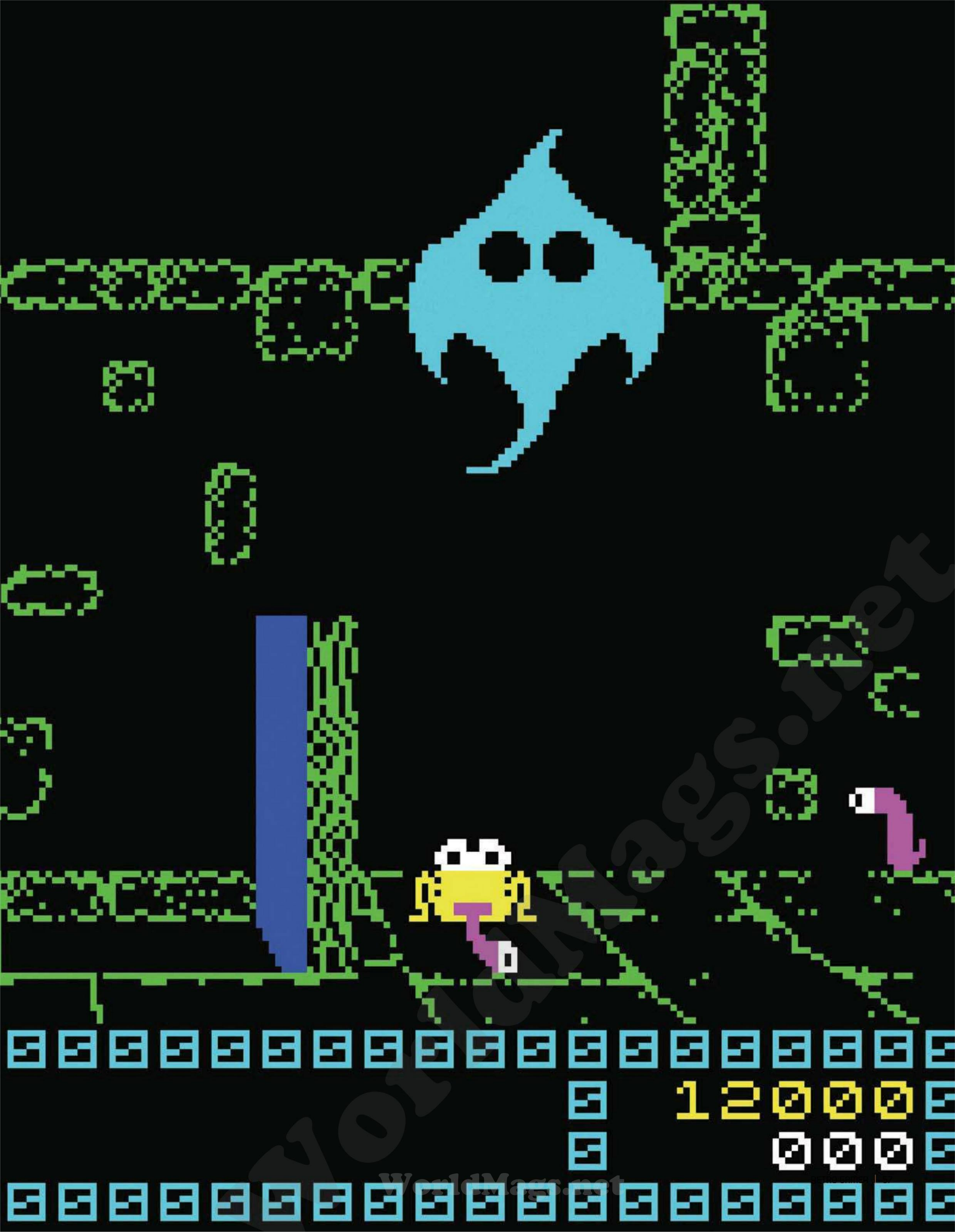


HISTORY

Berk's aghast expression says it all really. The Thing who lives upstairs has called for a can of worms, causing chaos down in the basement. Berk opens the trap door to release some worms, only for an evil spirit to escape from the depths below, while Drutt, Berk's spider-like pet, starts eating the damn worms, sucking them into his mouth like pieces of spaghetti. Meanwhile, beneath the trap door, a cast of weird and wonderful characters are waiting to emerge, including a fire-breathing robot and a bug-eyed thing with a penchant for stamping on stuff. "A joke's a joke," as Berk once said in the animated TV show on which the videogame is based, "but this goes way beyond the realms of light entertainment…"

I don't remember much about *The Trap Door* TV series. When it first aired in 1984 I was still in short trousers and a lot of the warped humour whizzed right over my head. Don Priestley's game, on the other hand, made a much greater impression on me and I can clearly recall certain scenes in glorious Specnicolor: Berk boiling 'slimies' in a cauldron; Berk filling a vat with oversized eyeballs; Berk chasing after a freaky purple bird, trying to catch falling eggs in a frying pan. While the various puzzles were devilishly inventive, it was the super-sized graphics that made the game so memorable. Don Priestley used this bold visual style before and after *The Trap Door*, but never to better effect. In terms of looks it's as close to the TV show as you could ever hope to see on the Spectrum.

Going back to the game today is a slightly shocking experience, not because it hasn't aged well, but because it's actually better than I remember it. Thanks to its great graphics, smart gameplay and superb presentation, this quirky classic still manages to leave me open-mouthed – a bit like poor old Berk.


12000
000





Year released: 1987

Original price: £599

Buy it now for: £20

Associated magazines: Amiga World, Amiga Format, CU Amiga, Amiga Power, Amiga Action, Amiga Computing, Amiga Force, Amiga Mania, The One

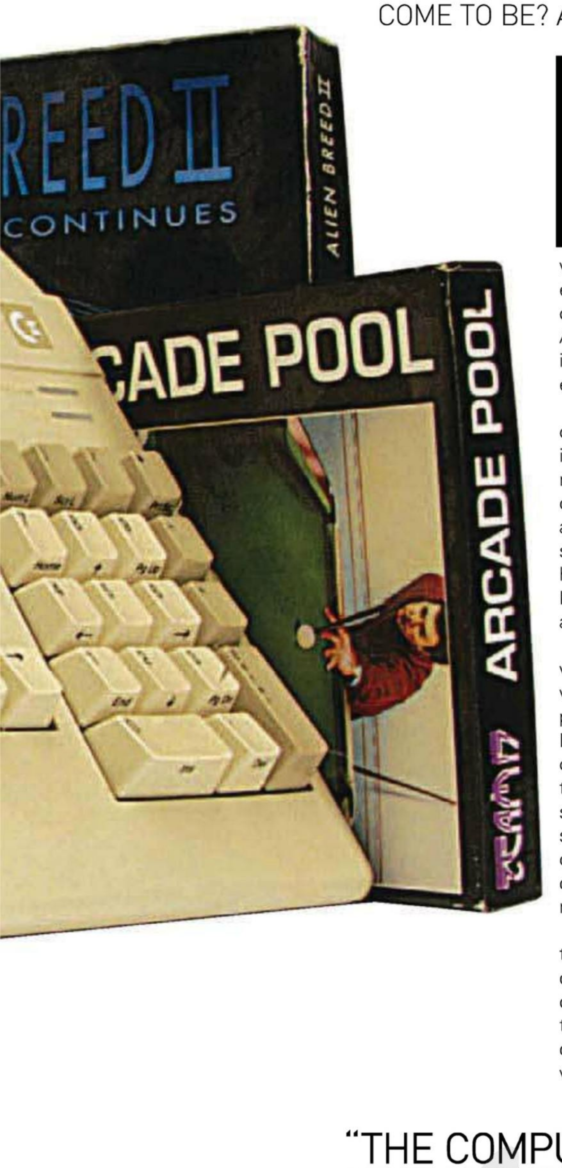
Why the Amiga 500 was great… Why *wasn't* the Amiga great? During its early years, the A500 was the most desirable games machine on the planet thanks to several games that just wouldn't have been possible anywhere other than the arcades. As the years passed, its graphics became less relevant but the ease of development meant that there were hundreds of programmers pumping out classic after classic on a seemingly weekly basis.



RETROINSPECTION

AMIGA 500

FEW WORDS GET THE NOSTALGIA GLANDS FLOWING LIKE 'AMIGA' AND '500'. TO HEAR IT IS TO BE TRANSPORTED BACK TO A TIME WHEN NEW 2D VISUALS STILL HAD THE ABILITY TO SHOCK AND WHEN UK DEVELOPERS PRODUCED THE BEST COMPUTER GAMES IN THE ENTIRE WORLD. BUT HOW DID THE MUCH-LOVED HOME COMPUTER COME TO BE? ASHLEY DAY REVEALS ALL...



For a home computer that's so inextricably associated with the history and fate of Commodore, it's perhaps a little surprising that the Amiga's genesis can be tracked all the way back to Commodore's biggest rival: Atari. Jay Miner, a talented designer of integrated circuits had joined Atari during the boom period of the late Seventies and was responsible for designing the display hardware in the Atari 2600. With this achievement alone, Miner's place in the videogame history books would be assured, but it was what he planned to create next that would really elevate him into the halls of fame. While at Atari, Miner had envisioned a new type of games machine that would make use of Motorola's powerful 68000 processor. Atari, which was then under the control of Warner Communications, had little interest in the 68000, however, and was much more interested in continuing to exploit the cheaper 6502 processors found in its 8-bit machines.

Disenchanted with the way Atari had been handled in the post-Bushnell organisation, Miner left the company in 1980 and, for a short time, he worked in the medical industry designing pacemakers. Two years later, however, Miner received a phone call that would rocket him back into the computer industry and change the history of gaming forever. On the end of the line was Larry Kaplan, another ex-Atari employee who had left to found Activision. Kaplan was keen to start a new videogame company and was looking for funding. Miner suggested a handful of dentist friends who were happy to invest in new projects and, before he knew it, he found himself working at a new company called Hi-Toro with Kaplan and a group of highly talented ex-Atari engineers.

In order to keep money rolling in, Hi-Toro was split into two divisions. The first would work on peripherals for games consoles like the 2600 and Colecovision, while a second much more secretive division would experiment with the 68000 processor to create a killer 16-bit games machine. The computer was codenamed Lorraine (after the wife of Hi-Toro's chief executive) and was designed to be as open a development system as possible so that anyone could make a game if they wanted to – this strategy had worked wonders for the hugely successful C64 so it made sense for Hi-Toro to follow suit. It was also decided that, to take the strain from the processor and ensure arcade-quality graphics, Lorraine would use custom-designed chips rather than off-the-shelf components. This meant that the computer would be more expensive to produce than its nearest rivals but the end results would be far better.

1983 was something of a turning point for Hi-Toro and Lorraine. While the rest of the Western videogaming world recoiled in horror from the disastrous videogames crash, Hi-Toro cunningly rethought its organisation in order to survive the harsh consumer climate. The peripherals division, now made redundant by the failure of the console market, was abolished while Lorraine was redesigned to be as much a computer as it was a games machine. A keyboard, mouse and expansion options were fitted as standard, while new staff were hired to work on a fully fledged

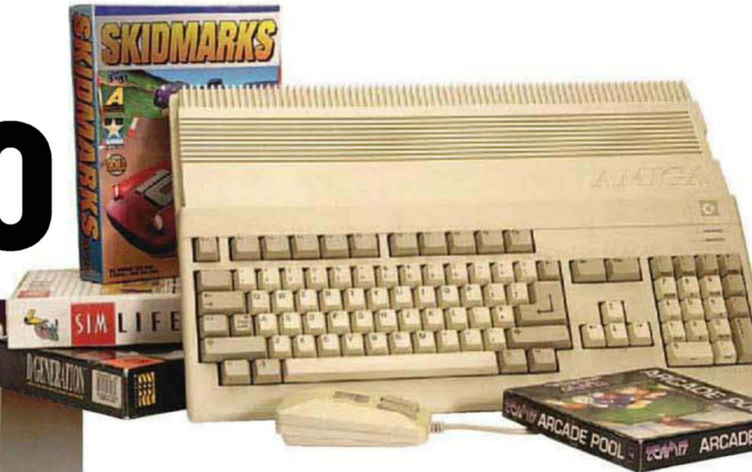
"THE COMPUTER WOULD BE MORE EXPENSIVE TO PRODUCE THAN ITS NEAREST RIVALS"

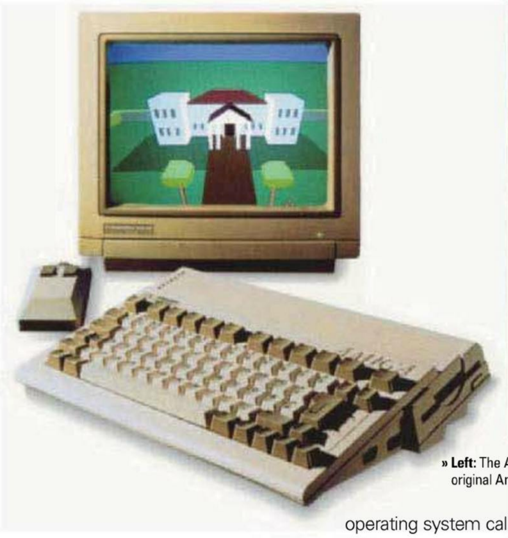
Amiga 2600

Although some may know that the Amiga company (aka Hi-Toro) started out developing for the Atari 2600, few have actually played the games, mostly because they were developed for an obscure controller and released in limited quantities. Amiga's Joyboard was an Atari 2600 controller on which the player had to stand and control its games by moving from side to side. Three games were released for the Joyboard: *Mogul Mania*, a skiing game; the unreleased surfing game, *Surf's Up*; and a Simon Says clone called *Off Your Rocker*. Technically finished in 1983, *Off Your Rocker* never actually had an official release as Amiga couldn't afford to pay for the cartridges to be labelled. The labelling company held onto the cartridges and eventually sold them to Pleasant Valley Video, years later, who then sold them on to the 2600 community with homemade labels.



AMIGA 500







» **Left:** The Amiga 600 was basically an A500+ in a smaller case. **Above:** The original Amiga 1000 complete with handy keyboard garage.

operating system called Intuition. It is also around this time that Hi-Toro was renamed as Amiga. The Toro name had already been in use by a Japanese gardening technologies firm so it was thought that a new name was needed to avoid confusion. Amiga, a Spanish word meaning 'female friend', was picked for its non-threatening nature. Finally, in September 1983, Lorraine's three main custom chips (later known as Agnus, Denise and Paula) were completed but were far too big to be used inside a working home computer – each was the size of a large circuit board.

By 1984, Amiga was ready to show off its top secret project and, on 4 January, Lorraine was unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago. The machine itself didn't look that impressive – as it was still in the prototype stage and was made up of several circuit 'breadboards' joined together – but it was how the computer looked on-screen that really wowed the CES attendees. RJ Mical, one of the coders behind Intuition, had programmed the now legendary 'Boing Ball' demo. 'Boing Ball' was demonstrated at the CES in an attempt to showcase Lorraine's graphical capabilities and did not disappoint. The red and white chequered ball, now an official logo for the Amiga, would bounce around the screen and alternate the direction of its rotations, all while an Intuition window functioned at 100 per cent speed in the background.

The amazing graphical demo was enough to convince one company that Lorraine was worth investing in and, ironically enough, that company was Jay Miner's old employer, Atari. Interested in the custom chips, rather than the computer itself, Atari offered to buy 1 million shares in Amiga for $3 each and even loaned the firm $500,000 to keep it afloat while the paperwork was finalised. The deal soon began to turn sour, however. Atari knew that Amiga could not afford to pay off its $500,000 loan and so delayed paperwork on the buyout and, in the meantime, reduced its offer to 98 cents per share. Things were looking grim for Amiga. Atari was gearing up to buy the company at a bargain price and didn't even plan to finish the computer that Miner had dreamed of for the past four years. Just before the Atari deal could be finalised, however, Amiga managed to find another enterprising computer company which was both willing to pay a fair price for Lorraine and help develop it into the machine that Miner and company had intended. That company was, of course, Commodore, which swooped in at the last minute to buy Amiga for $4.24 per share and even gave them $1 million to pay off their debt to Atari.

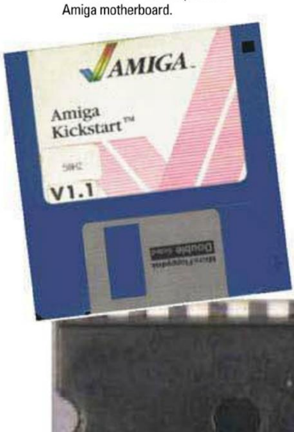
With that sticky situation behind it and rejuvenated by a $17 million investment from its new owner, Amiga set about finishing the Lorraine project, which was now to be known as the Commodore Amiga. The custom chipset was finally finished and reduced to a manageable size. Named after different people, so that competitors wouldn't realise what they were talking about in public, each of the chips performed a very specific task. Denise was the graphics co-processor and Paula controlled the sounds and external ports while Gary handled miscellaneous operations. Agnus, meanwhile, was the most important of the chips. Its main function was to regulate access to the on-board RAM but it also included two co-processors, known as Copper and Blitter, which allowed the Amiga to display the astounding graphics for which it became famous. Copper was designed to handle up to eight different sprites anywhere on screen at a single time, while Blitter was responsible for moving bitmap images around in memory much faster than the

"THE MACHINE ITSELF DIDN'T LOOK THAT IMPRESSIVE, BUT IT WAS HOW THE COMPUTER LOOKED ON-SCREEN THAT REALLY WOWED THE CES ATTENDEES"

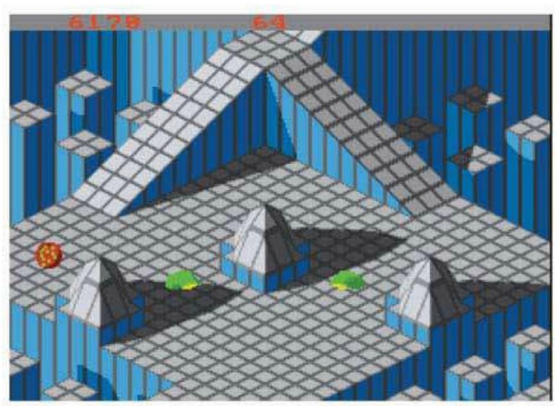


» An original promo shot for the hugely successful 'Bat Pack'.

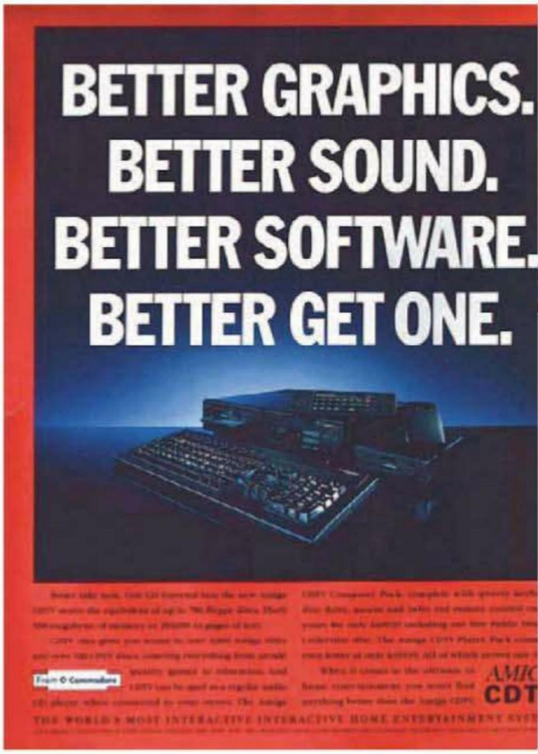
» **Below:** The original Kickstart came on floppy disk but by the time of the A500 it was a ROM chip on the Amiga motherboard.







» *Marble Madness* was one of the first coin-op conversions on the Amiga and was virtually arcade perfect.



» An advert for the ill-conceived CDTV.



» The CDTV, complete with peripherals to turn it into a fully functioning A500.



» Jay Miner (1932 - 1994), the father of the Amiga.



» The Cartoon Classics Amiga 500 bundle included the brilliant *Lemmings*.

CPU would have been able to on its own. On the software side, the Amiga also saw major advancements during its final months of design. Intuition was renamed Amiga DOS (later shortened to Amiga OS) and was separated into two entities. Kickstart took care of the Amiga's basic needs, giving it just enough instructions to launch whatever program you fed into the floppy drive. Workbench, meanwhile, was the Amiga's Graphical User Interface. It was the Windows of its day and one of the first to offer a true multitasking environment, years before the PC.

On 23 July 1985, the Amiga 1000 made its first official public appearance at the Lincoln Centre in New York. In typical Commodore fashion, the latest fashionable celebrities, in this case Andy Warhol and Debbie Harry, were roped in to promote the computer. The pair were enlisted to demonstrate the Amiga's graphical capabilities in the program *Graphic Craft*, while *Music Craft* was shown off with a full synthesised score, written by the program's authors. The lavish launch ceremony worked and when the Amiga 1000 launched in September 1985 it was an instant hit with those who could afford it. But at $1,295, the A1000 was twice the price of its nearest competitor, the Atari ST, and way out of the price range of the casual user. Those only interested in playing games weren't quite willing to pay up for an A1000 either, as aside from the stunning-looking *Defender Of The Crown* and the Commodore-published *Mind Walker*, the best games on the computer were all ports of existing Atari ST titles. Something would have to change if Commodore wanted the Amiga to dominate the home computer market in the same way as the C64 had.

In 1987 Commodore answered the prayers of those gamers with the launch of the Amiga 500. Essentially a cut-down version of the A1000, the 500 crammed a motherboard, several expansion ports and a disk drive into a slim keyboard casing. It was also compatible with household televisions and featured an upgraded version of Amiga DOS. The loss of a monitor and compact design also meant that the A500 was much cheaper to produce than the Amiga 1000 and could, crucially, be priced low enough to realistically compete with the Atari ST.

June 1987 saw the UK launch of the A500 at £599, which may seem expensive in an age where people cry and moan at the £425 PlayStation 3 but was actually very reasonable for a computer of the day and saw the 500 become a much more affordable system for computer gamers of the late Eighties. *Defender Of The Crown* made its UK debut alongside the 500 and had the same effect on gamers as it had the year before in the States. The detailed graphics, the number of colours on screen, the incredible musical score and the first-person-perspective jousting were like nothing anyone had ever seen on a computer or console before and as soon as those gamers saw it running they just had to have an Amiga. 1987 was also the year that many European developers began thinking about shifting development from C64 and Spectrum to the Amiga. The affordable A500 and open architecture of the computer made it the next logical step for Europe's smaller development houses and bedroom programmers. Great UK codeshops like Psygnosis, The Bitmap Brothers, Bullfrog and Sensible Software all began working on the Amiga around 1987/88 and slowly but surely the A500 began to build up a catalogue of games that made it one of the most desirable machines available. This was great for Commodore, of course, and even better for UK gamers but did, unfortunately, cause a bit of a headache for American Amiga fans. With most of the



» *Code Name Hell Squad* was the last commercial game to be released for the A500.

Links

One of the greatest things about old Amiga software is that it can be acquired for free on the internet, or bought for less than a pound per game at auction. For further information on the Amiga's vast number of releases, *Retro Gamer* recommends www.lemonamiga.com and hol.abime.net – both excellent databases of Amiga games. www.aminet.net should help those looking for shareware games and utilities and is also well worth visiting for its historical importance, as the website has been around since 1992 and was once an essential archive for web-surfing Amiga owners. Finally, fans of Team 17 may like to visit www.dream17.co.uk – the only place where Team 17's Amiga back catalogue can be legally downloaded for free.

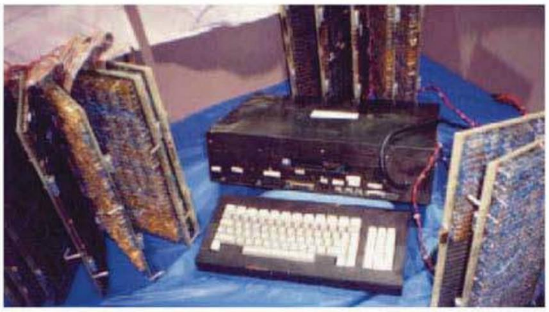


"A CUT-DOWN VERSION OF THE AMIGA 1000, THE 500 CRAMMED A MOTHERBOARD, SEVERAL EXPANSION PORTS AND A DISK DRIVE INTO A SLIM KEYBOARD CASING"

AMIGA 500

"COMMODORE HAD CREATED ONE OF THE WORLD'S FIRST MULTIMEDIA SET-TOP BOXES BUT IT SEEMED THAT NOBODY, INCLUDING COMMODORE, WAS READY FOR SUCH NEW TECHNOLOGY"





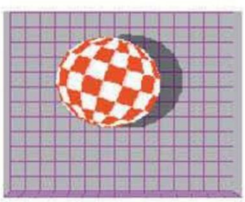
» The Lorraine prototype as it appeared at the Consumer Electronics Show in 1984.



» *Shadow Of The Beast* was a UK-developed game that looked far better than anything the Americans had made.



» Most of Commodore's print ads missed the point of why the Amiga 500 was so popular.



» The 'Boing Ball' demo as it would have first appeared at the Consumer Electronics Show.

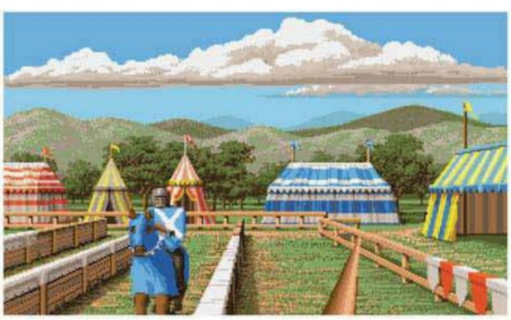
Amiga's greatest games coming out of Europe, US gamers suffered the brunt of PAL/NTSC incompatibility problems and had to resort to fitting switches into their precious computers and even buying expensive multiformat monitors.

The UK's favourable relationship with the Amiga didn't end with the software developers as Commodore UK also seemed to have a better idea of how to promote the computer than its International counterpart. Seeing that the Amiga 500, like the C64 before it, was destined for success as a games machine rather than a business machine, Commodore UK began producing packages that bundled the computer with several games at a discount price. While Commodore International had packaged the A500 with business software and digital art packages, David Pleasance at Commodore UK negotiated with Warner Bros. to create the Batman Pack, which bundled an A500 along with a copy of the new *Batman* game (based on the Tim Burton film) as well as copies of *The New Zealand Story*, *Interceptor* and EA's incredible *Deluxe Paint 2* for just £399. In the run-up to Christmas 1989 the 'Bat Pack', as Amiga fans affectionately named it, helped raise the number of UK Amiga owners to over 2 million – a success that saw Pleasance promoted to managing director of Commodore UK.

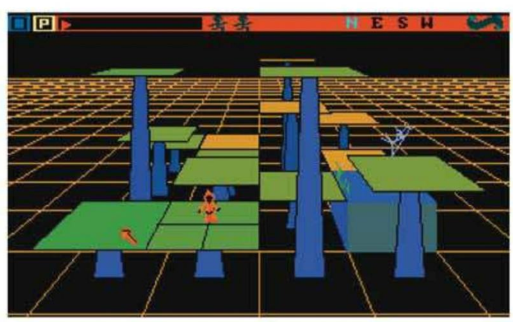
The next few years saw several other games bundles released but it was the Bat Pack that really sealed the success of the Amiga 500 and helped sell enough machines to ensure that the Atari ST became a distant memory. But for every success that Commodore UK achieved, it seemed as though Commodore International was close behind with a disastrous plan, destined to sink the Amiga to the bottom of the sea. One of the first of these suicidal business decisions was the infamous CDTV. By stripping the keyboard and disk drive from the Amiga 500, adding a CD-ROM drive and packaging it in a sleek VCR style casing, Commodore had created one of the world's first multimedia set-top boxes but it seemed that nobody, including Commodore, was ready for such new technology. Priced at £699, the CDTV was £300 more than the average Amiga 500 and compatible with far fewer games, while software manufacturers seemed to have little idea of how to take advantage of the CD-ROM medium. Needless to say, the CDTV was a huge flop and was discontinued a year later. The whole project was a huge financial loss and public embarrassment for Commodore and would not be its last needless folly.

For the time being, however, the traditional Amiga 500 continued to go from strength to strength with 1991 proving to be something of a golden year for the computer. Despite competition from the Super Nintendo and Mega Drive and a slight drop in A500 hardware sales, existing owners were rewarded with some of the greatest games in the history of the Amiga. Commodore UK launched the Amiga 500 Plus, which was virtually identical to the existing 500 but came with a full 1MB of RAM as standard. A whole new wave of quality games followed. *Another World, Full Contact, SWIV, Cruise For A Corpse, Lemmings, Moonstone, Leander, Alien Breed, Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker, The Secret Of Monkey Island, Mega Lo Mania, Exile*… the list of defining Amiga titles to appear in 1991 goes





» For many early Amiga owners, the stunning *Defender Of The Crown* justified the purchase of the computer alone.



» Created by the late Bill Williams, *Mind Walker* is believed to be the first Amiga game ever made and was published by Commodore itself.



» *Metal Warrior*, one of the best homebrew games on the A500.



on and on. Some of these games even found themselves packaged into the Amiga's second most popular hardware bundle. Cartoon Classics cost £359 and included *Lemmings*, *The Simpsons*, *Captain Planet* and *Deluxe Paint 3*. Many of these games and others that followed in the coming months made use of the ECS chipset in the A500 Plus, which created another problem for American Amigans who never received an official release of the hardware update. Eager to play the European hits, they were forced to hardwire an extra 512KB of Chip RAM into their Amigas and even faced the prospect of having to pull out the Agnus chip and pop in the new Fat Agnus to cope with addressing the full megabyte of RAM.

The 500 Plus was soon discontinued, however, as Commodore made efforts to compete with the console market with the Amiga 600. Another variation on the 500 hardware, the A600 was launched in 1992 and featured a much smaller casing, presumably so that it could more comfortably occupy the space underneath a television set rather than hogging a computer desk. Some models of the A600 even came with internal hard drives, which reduced the need for messy disk swapping. But the 600 was ultimately seen as too little too late and was soon dropped by Commodore as its sales fizzled out.

While Commodore failed to re-ignite hardware sales, however, software sales continued to be very strong for Amiga developers.



» The impact of the Amiga continues to be felt to this day.

Despite a rising threat from piracy, developers still managed to prosper on the Amiga. Team 17, for example, released a record nine Amiga games in 1993 and even shared a Publisher of the Year award with Electronic Arts that year. Public Domain houses also flourished during this period, distributing huge volumes of indie games long before the term 'homebrew' even existed.

The coming years saw Commodore stumble one too many times and eventually implode despite the brilliance of its second-generation Amigas, the 4000, 1200 and CD32, but that didn't stop the Amiga 500 from continuing to be a critical success. Even without an official hardware presence, over 150 Amiga games were released in 1994, another 90 in 1995 and a further 86 between 1996 and 2000. Among those releases were even more of the Amiga's all-time greats such as *Worms*, *Theme Park* and *Beneath A Steel Sky*.

The point-and-click adventure *Code Name Hell Squad* was the final commercial game to be compatible with the Amiga 500, although it did require a CD-ROM drive. That new games were being released 13 years after the launch of A500 and six years after the fall of Commodore is testament to the dedication of the Amiga user base and the passion of its software developers. Incidentally, many of those users are still around, still using their Amigas and even producing new software. The last three years have seen a handful of decent shareware releases such as *Metal Warrior* and *Tank Wars*, while advances in the Amiga emulation scene – most notably through the only legal solution, Amiga Forever – should see more new shareware games released for years to come.

Amiga itself is still around too. After being sold from company to company over the last 13 years, Amiga Inc is now mostly a software company, although it is working to produce new hardware. It should be noted, though, that the new Amigas are Power PC -based computers that have little in common with Jay Miner's original vision, other than the promising Amiga OS 4, and will not be compatible with any old Amiga software.

Regardless of the trials and tribulations of the hardware itself, however, the Amiga's greatest legacy is the excellent catalogue of games that were available for it and the huge number of European developers who cut their teeth on the Amiga and now create some of the greatest games of today. Rockstar North, Team 17, Sony Liverpool, Lionhead, Bizarre Creations… many of these developers, and more, might not be around today were it not for the power and accessibility offered by the Amiga 500 in 1987.



» The original Workbench operating system looks garish now but was a technical marvel in 1985.

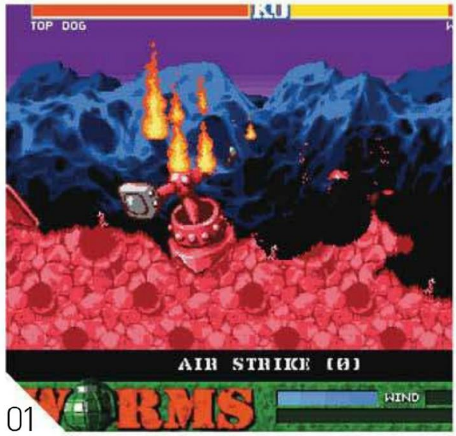


» Two limited-edition A500s produced, in Germany, to commemorate the sale of 1 million Amigas in 1989.

AMIGA 500

PERFECT TEN GAMES

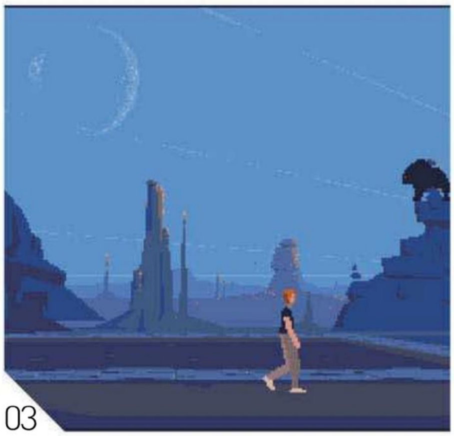
Amiga's Commodore 500 was a truly massive success, so it should come as no surprise that a variety of superb videogames are available for it. Indeed, it's practically impossible to name just ten games, as for every one we put forward, three other titles were just as deserving. It was a hard task but still, here's what we finally decided on…



01



02



03



04

WORMS

- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
- » **CREATED BY:** TEAM 17
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BODY BLOWS

01 **You'd have thought that by 1995, ten years after the Amiga 1000's launch, it had seen every one of its defining games already.** Well, Andy Davidson and Yorkshire-based Team 17 obviously thought there was room for one more and the world agreed with them. *Worms* was an absolute sensation and went on to sell millions of copies across countless formats, sequels and spin-offs. It's important to remember that the multiplayer strategy game began life on the Amiga, however, and was mostly a five-year labour of love of just one man and a copy of Blitz Basic. And that was what was really great about the Amiga: it turned bedroom programmers into millionaires and created memorable franchises that endure for a lifetime. Can the same be said of the Xbox? We think not.

JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** VIRGIN
- » **CREATED BY:** ARCHER MACLEAN
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DROPZONE

02 ***Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker* deserves to be in the Perfect Ten because it was the first videogame to really make snooker work on a home computer and it remains a damn good sports title to this very day.** The 3D graphics and accurate real-time physics on each of the balls made *Whirlwind Snooker* a landmark game that pushed the hardware further than most gamers thought was possible. It's arguable that the game has never been bettered, if not in its gameplay and graphics then definitely in its delightful sense of humour. Who can forget the rather cheeky faces the balls would pull if you didn't take a shot? A true classic sports game that was a joy to play.

ANOTHER WORLD

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** VIRGIN
- » **CREATED BY:** DELPHINE SOFTWARE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FUTURE WARS

03 ***Defender Of The Crown* and *Shadow Of The Beast* may be the two games that wowed consumers enough to buy an Amiga but they were both severely lacking in the gameplay department.** *Another World*, on the other hand, had both incredible graphics and utterly gripping gameplay to match. Essentially an evolution of the *Prince Of Persia* style of game, *Another World* swapped sword fighting for laser guns and added a bunch of fiendishly tricky action puzzles. The game looked stunning too; the use of vector graphics was a stroke of genius that ensured that *Another World* looked light years ahead of any other game of the time. Such a shame that Eric Chahi hasn't made another game since, although he's said to be working on an idea for a new strategy title.

LEMMINGS

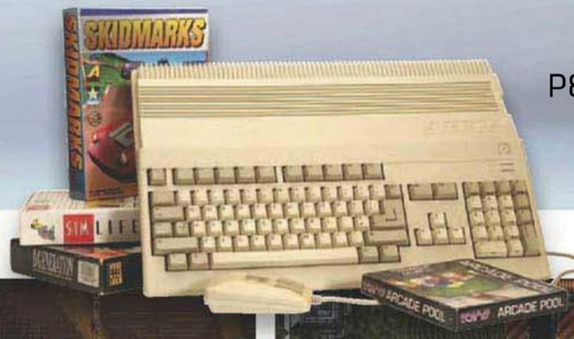
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** PSYGNOSIS
- » **CREATED BY:** DMA DESIGN
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BODY HARVEST

04 **What can be said about *Lemmings* that hasn't already been said before? It has appeared on nearly every videogames format known to man and is surely as much a household name as *Tetris* and *Space Invaders*.** Sequels and updates continue to appear to this day and the little suicidal rodents show no sign of losing their popularity. Back in 1991, however, the release of *Lemmings* was a complete surprise. The concept was totally original and made for an instant hit. Its biggest achievement: the simple presentation and easy-to-use control system meant that anyone could pick up the game and play it. *Lemmings* had the whole family playing games together 15 years before the Nintendo Wii had even launched. Not only a classic game, but a videogame icon.

SPEEDBALL 2

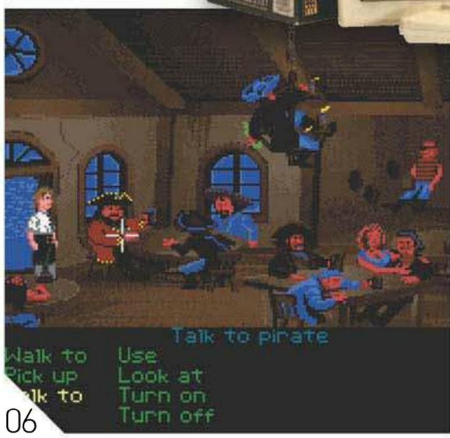
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** IMAGE WORKS
- » **CREATED BY:** BITMAP BROTHERS
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** XENON 2

05 **The recent news that a next-generation remake of *Speedball 2* is in the works has had retro gaming fans drooling uncontrollably into our coffee cups every morning since the game's announcement.** Why, you may ask us? Because the original Amiga game was sheer digital perfection, the likes of which had never been seen before, or since. Oozing style from the Bitmaps' trademark metallic visuals to the cries of "Ice Cream!, Ice Cream!", *Speedball 2's* greatest triumph was its imaginative rule set and peerless two-player gameplay. Many Amiga owners must remember whiling away hour after hour with a friend and probably do so to this day. A finer sports game is impossible to find, in the past or present. It's so good, in fact, that we wish it was a real sport.





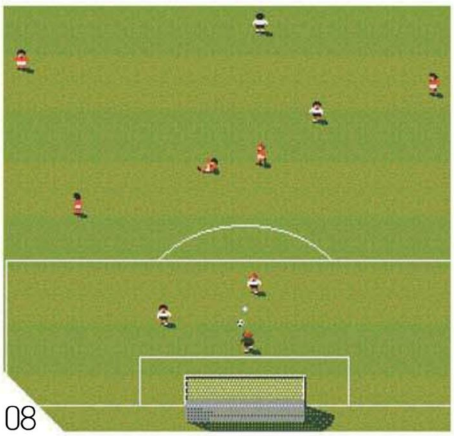
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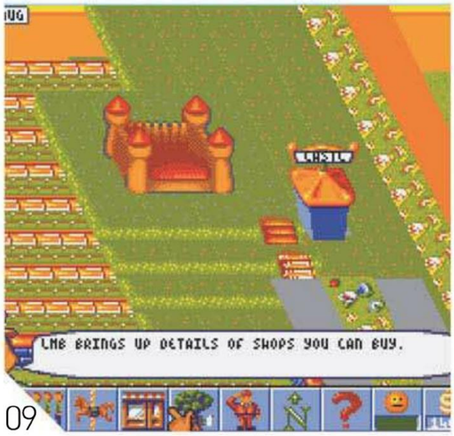
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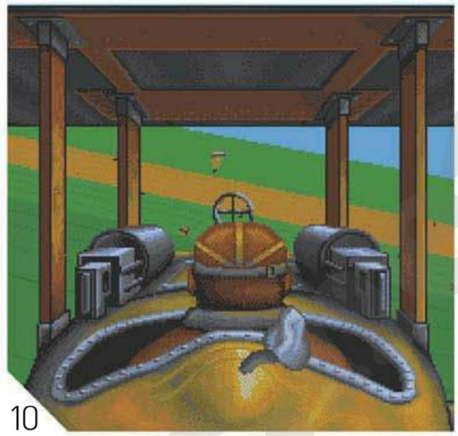
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THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** US GOLD
- » **CREATED BY:** LUCASFILM GAMES
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE

06 The Amiga's incredible graphical capabilities and standard mouse controller made it a perfect machine for point-and-click adventures and there were plenty of them made over the years. Picking out a favourite is an incredibly difficult task but as *The Secret Of Monkey Island* will have been the first adventure that many of us actually played on the Amiga, we have to go for that. Using an enhanced version of the SCUMM engine from *Maniac Mansion*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* looked great and featured plenty of brilliant puzzles. But it was the insane humour that really set it apart from the competition. The world would be a much duller place without Insult Sword fighting now wouldn't it?

ALIEN BREED

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** TEAM 17
- » **CREATED BY:** TEAM 17
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** QWAK

07 With only one previous title, the beat-'em-up, *Full Contact*, to its name, few expected much from ex-PD codeshop Team 17 with its second title. That is until *Alien Breed* made its stunning debut and sent jaws hurtling towards the floor up and down the country. One of the first Amiga games to use a full 1MB of RAM, *Alien Breed* looked incredible back in the day and played even better. Basically a sci-fi version of *Gauntlet* with a great two-player mode, tons of cool weapons and even sampled speech, *Alien Breed* set Team 17's standard for creating top-quality arcade-style titles on the Amiga. Later sequels were technically better but none quite had the shocking impact of the original. No wonder its Special Edition spent a whopping 33 weeks in the budget charts.

SENSIBLE SOCCER

- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** RENEGADE
- » **CREATED BY:** SENSIBLE SOFTWARE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CANNON FODDER

08 Football videogames have been around for as long as games machines themselves and, over the years, they have become much more realistic simulations of the sport as technology has improved. There's one football game that managed to be extremely playable without being a simulation, however, and that game was the mighty *Sensible Soccer.* With the emphasis placed well and truly on the fun factor, *Sensible Soccer* was, for many gamers, the greatest football game of the Nineties and remains the superior choice to this day (although just as many prefer *Sensible World Of Soccer*). There are still hundreds of people out there who kept hold of their Amigas just to play *Sensible Soccer* and now you can also play a version of the game on Xbox Live Arcade.

THEME PARK

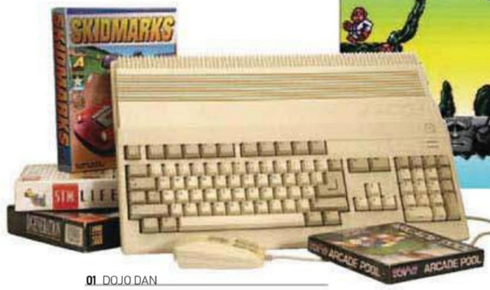
- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **CREATED BY:** BULLFROG
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SYNDICATE

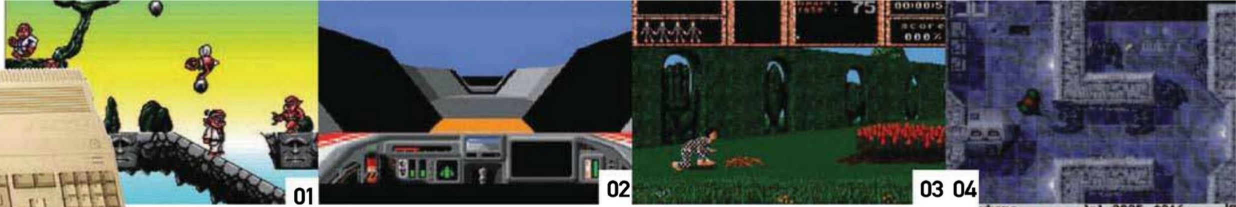
09 Back in the early Nineties, resource management games were defined by one title alone: Will Wright's highly influential *Sim City.* A truly brilliant game, *Sim City's* only problem was that constant town planning wasn't actually that much fun. The average sugar-fuelled kid needed something with a little more colour, something with fast-moving vehicles and something where little cartoon people throw up on screen. Those needs were answered by British coding legend Peter Molyneux and his ground-breaking *Theme Park.* Designing stomach-churning rollercoasters was endless fun for the child in all of us, while adding extra salt to food in order to improve drinks sales appealed to the unscrupulous capitalist inside. The DS remake is well worth a look as well.

WINGS

- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **FREELY RELEASED BY:** CINEMAWARE
- » **CREATED BY:** CINEMAWARE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DEFENDER OF THE CROWN

10 You couldn't ask for a more varied game than Cinemaware's *Wings.* Not only did the World War I game feature isometric shooting sections and two-dimensional bombing runs but it also had a tasty three-dimensional dog-fighting mode that was way ahead of its time. It's hard to believe that the game was made in 1990 as the 3D sections looked absolutely incredible and far in advance of anything that had appeared on consoles, PC or even the arcades at the time. Not just a graphical treat, *Wings* also had emotional impact and fully immersed you in its world. In between each level it would show pages of a diary, which told of the main character's eerily realistic wartime experiences, provoking an emotional response in the player that is all too rare in retro and modern gaming alike.



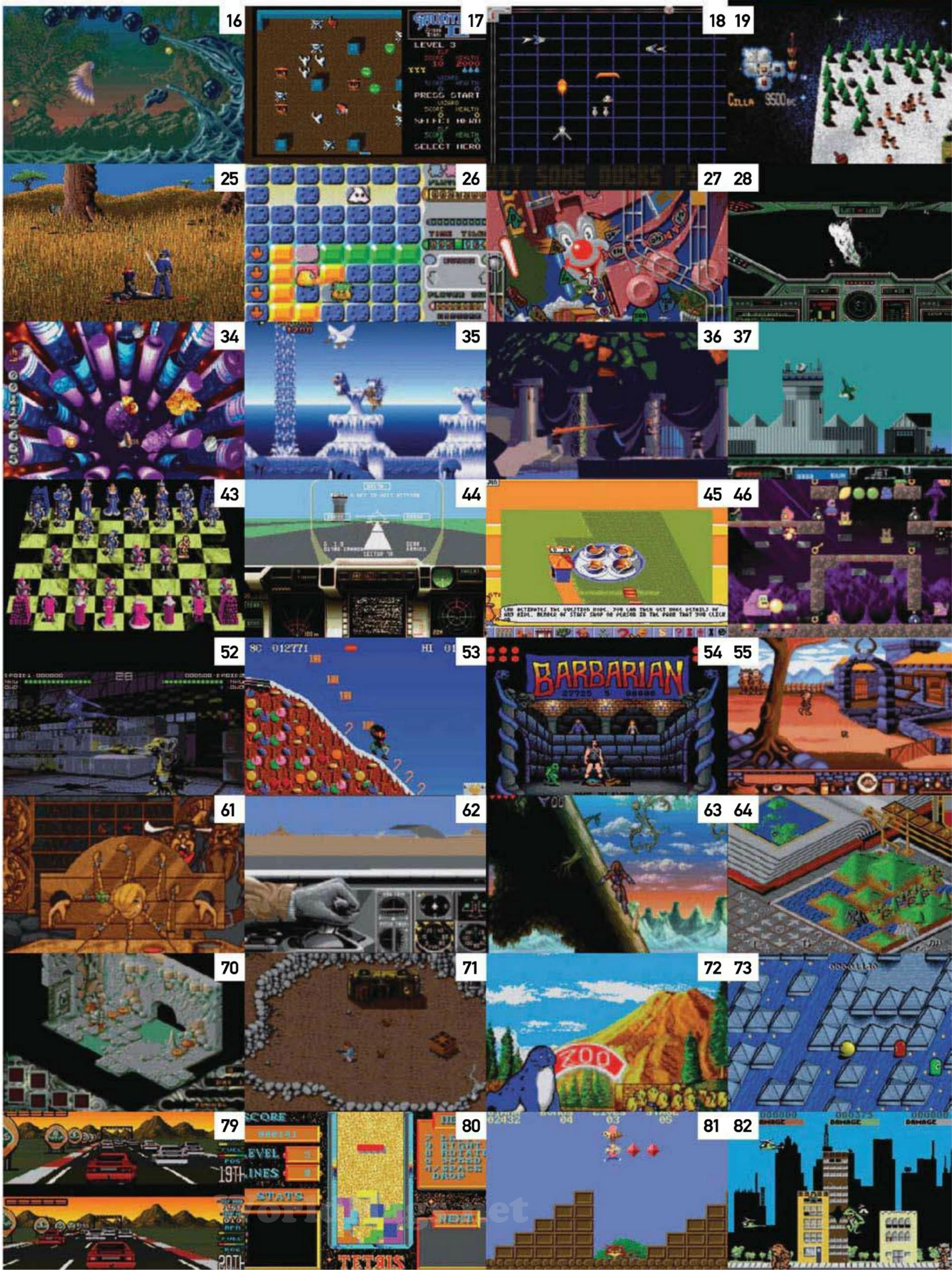




AMIGA 500

and the rest...

Commodore's 16-bit triumph features so many games that we'd need a whole mag just to feature them. Console yourself with the following shots…



01 DOJO DAN
02 POWERDROME
03 WEIRD DREAMS
04 ALIEN BREED
05 DISPOSABLE HERO
06 MAGIC POCKETS
07 CARRIER COMMAND
08 RAMPART
09 LAST NINJA REMIX
10 SIM CITY
11 WINGS
12 DRAGON'S LAIR
13 MIDWINTER
14 SHADOW OF THE BEAST
15 TOTAL ECLIPSE
16 AGONY
17 GAUNTLET II
18 GRID RUNNER
19 MEGA LO MANIA
20 VIRUS
21 ROBOCOP
22 AIRBORNE RANGER
23 EXILE
24 CRYSTAL KINGDOM DIZZY
25 MOONSTONE: A HARD DAY'S KNIGHT
26 SKWEEK
27 PINBALL FANTASIES
28 WING COMMANDER
29 THE IMMORTAL
30 BUGGY BOY
31 FIRST SAMURAI
32 KATAKIS
33 OPERATION WOLF
34 STARDUST
35 FIRE AND ICE
36 ANOTHER WORLD
37 JETSTRIKE
38 NEBULUS
39 UNREAL
40 RAINBOW ISLANDS
41 COOL CROC TWINS
42 GUNSHIP 2000
43 BATTLE CHESS
44 F29 RETALIATOR
45 THEME PARK
46 QWAK
47 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
48 HEROQUEST
49 PIPE DREAM
50 LEMMINGS
51 WALKER
52 RISE OF THE ROBOTS
53 ZOOL
54 BARBARIAN
55 GOBLIIINS
56 IT CAME FROM THE DESERT
57 PINBALL DREAMS
58 CANNON FODDER
59 R-TYPE
60 STAR WARS
61 HEIMDALL
62 FALCON
63 LIONHEART
64 POPULOUS
65 SPACE ACE
66 SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
67 CRUISE FOR A CORPSE
68 OBLITERATOR
69 SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER
70 CADAVER
71 JURASSIC PARK
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73 PAC-MANIA
74 SPINDIZZY WORLDS
75 WIZBALL
76 FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX
77 PGA EUROPEAN TOUR
78 IK+
79 LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE
80 TETRIS
81 GREAT GIANA SISTERS
82 RAMPAGE
83 XENON 2: MEGABLAST
84 LEGEND OF KYRANDIA
85 RODLAND
86 THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
87 ARCHER MACLEAN'S POOL



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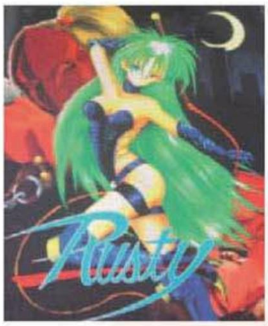
遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

IT'S CASTLEVANIA ON THE PC98. WAIT A MINUTE... NO IT'S NOT!

RUSTY

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** C-LAB
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NEC PC98
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE FOR:** N/A
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50 (YAHOO! JAPAN)
- » **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:** *SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV* (SNES)

Of all the *Castlevania* games, *Rusty* borrows most from *IV* on the SNES (which thankfully had a PAL release), so this would be the closest alternative (and vice versa, of course). They both contain exactly the same style of whip-swinging, stair-climbing and enemy-busting action as each other. Naturally, though, the level layouts and character designs are wholly different, which is why the one game complements the other so nicely. *Castlevania IV* is a bit easier, too.



Interesting fact
Rusty was neither the first nor last game by C-Lab (they remained obscure, developing for PC98, Mac and Windows), but it's certainly its most interesting. They also released a Mah-jong title for PSOne in 1998 (pictured).

Sometimes Eastern treasures can be found in strange guises. This month we look at C-Lab's *Rusty*, a title that shamelessly copies Konami's *Castlevania* series. Though it fails to win us over in the originality stakes, *Rusty* is a great imitation of a great series, rewarding our travels East.



» Poychi Robo lied about there being no nudity – small pixelised boobies are clearly visible here.

メガ駆動機構

What can you do when you're a huge *Castlevania* fan and have exhausted all your possibilities by playing every title released in the series (including imports and the rubbish ones)? The answer is to look Eastward, trying to find one of Japan's *Castlevania* clones that went unreleased in the West. Doing so you would discover the almost unheard of *Rusty* by C-Lab, released for NEC's PC-9801 home-computer (and apparently also DOS computers) in 1993. The PC-98 was a Japan-only 16-bit home computer, which originally came out in 1982, over the years being modified and enhanced so that there are now countless variations. Despite not reaching the West, it did have several prominent releases.

What makes *Rusty* interesting, especially to fans of the system, is that when trawling through a big box of second-hand PC-98 games, it's easy to be inundated with pornographic quest games and adventure titles that contain gratuitous nudity. So finding not only an excellent *Castlevania*-inspired action game but one that is also (mostly) devoid of nakedness, is something special. Admittedly, it's not entirely sanitised, there's the customary women in extremely tight leather outfits found in so many Japanese games, but it's not something you'd get fired for playing during a lunch break.

Rusty begins with a lengthy cutscene of static images explaining the storyline – something about local women being kidnapped by a vampiric demon overlord for depraved purposes, with our green-haired heroine *Rusty* being the only one who can save them. After each of the game's ten levels (which include a nightmarish boss at the end) have been conquered, there are

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

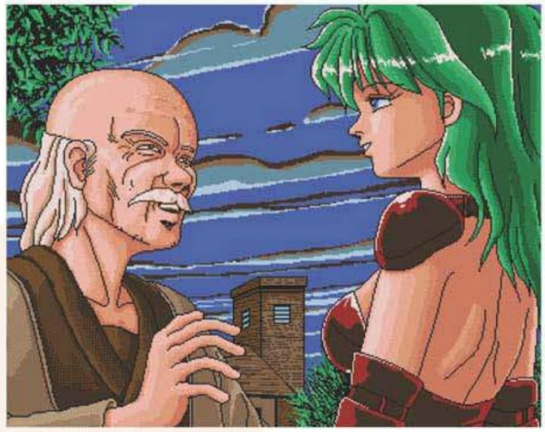
N PROMISE



» Mastering the ability to swing from hooks is essential to progress – much like in *Castlevania*.



» Any game that tries to replicate *Castlevania* must contain a church with stained glass windows – it's the law.



» Throughout the game, there are high-resolution and brightly coloured cutscenes such as this.

further cutscenes showing the young anime woman you've just rescued.

The similarities to *Castlevania* (or rather the fact that it was totally ripped off) become apparent prior to the start of the first level, with the introduction of a gradually expanding map screen that depicts an almost medieval-esque landscape reminiscent of *Transylvania*. Suddenly, you're stranded inside a village devoid of human life but infested with vile fiends. Just like the title it draws inspiration from, you must destroy enemies by whipping them, while traversing platforms, climbing ropes and stairs, finding keys to unlock doors (which are based on playing-card symbols), defeating freakish bosses and swinging from hooks with your whip. While the screen's scrolling may not have been quite as smooth, all of the core gameplay mechanics for *Rusty* were copied ad hoc from *Castlevania* in order to replicate its style, atmosphere, pacing and overall mood. There are other similarities too, such as featuring a church, waterfall and underground caverns, while the most obviously copied stage is a lengthy clock tower section, replete with turning gears in the background. Even the music is the same eclectic blend of classical piano, upbeat pop-synth and electric guitar. Despite having a very similar tempo and general tune, C-Lab's renditions aren't of the same astounding calibre as Konami's – though some would no doubt be fooled in a blind comparison test.

The major difference between the two titles is the level structure and layout (*Rusty* is the more difficult game), plus the enemy and boss designs. While *Castlevania*'s enemies were nearly all of mythical origin (Medusa, Death, Dracula, etc), those fought here are unique and have been designed specifically for the game. The first level ends with a topless vixen who has been fused into what resembles a flying dragon/turtle hybrid. Later stages have more women fused into various creatures, such as a lengthy Naga and hellishly deformed spider. The art design for these is clever and makes excellent use of the limited colour palette. As well as setting *Rusty* apart from what it imitates, thereby keeping the formula fairly fresh, it also adds a much-needed sense of discovery seeing what unusual demonic minions are in the next level.



» An electrically charged underground shrine, filled with these rather weak skeletal soldiers.

This is good since the game can be infuriatingly difficult, despite having unlimited continues and a save option (when it's Game Over, the first option in the small menu allows you to continue, while second choice lets you save and return to the title screen). This desire to see the next area ensures you return despite the challenge posed. Sticking with it also reveals deeper elements: each level has myriad hidden areas and secret items to be discovered, some of which include secondary weapons such as an owl who follows you and attacks on command.

The obvious reason for *Rusty* never reaching the UK is that the native hardware never made it here; why Konami never contested it is anyone's guess. Being a limited release from a fringe developer most likely made them lax; they probably don't even know it exists. If you want to experience this oddity for yourself, copies show up on Yahoo! Japan Auctions for around £50. A working PC-98 will be tougher to source, though, so emulation is the easiest option (anex86 with Japanese fonts). It never took hold of the market when released, but *Rusty* remains an unusual and surprisingly fun rip-off of a renowned classic.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

Whatever happened to...

STARFOX 2

ARGONAUT'S POLYGON-PUSHING SUPERFX CHIP WAS AN UNRIVALLED SUCCESS STORY OF BRITISH INNOVATION AND DESIGN, WHICH IN COLLABORATION WITH NINTENDO, RESULTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STARFOX. WITH SHIGERU MIYAMOTO AGAIN TAKING CONTROL FOR THE ANNOUNCED SEQUEL, HOPES WERE HIGH FOR ANOTHER GRAND SPACE ADVENTURE. LATE IN DEVELOPMENT, HOWEVER, WITH NINTENDO'S NEXT-GENERATION N64 ON THE HORIZON THE PROJECT WAS FRUSTRATINGLY CANCELLED. WITH EXCLUSIVE DEVELOPER INSIGHTS INTO ITS DEMISE, MATTHEW COCKBURN SUITS UP AND DELVES DEEPER

NEED TO KNOW

SYSTEM:
SUPER FAMICOM (SNES)

DEVELOPER:
NINTENDO/ARGONAUT SOFTWARE LTD

START OF DEVELOPMENT:
SUMMER 1993

DATE OF CANCELLATION:
SPRING 1995

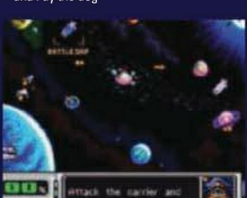
VERSION PLAYED BY RG:
FINAL BETA ROM (TRANSLATED VERSION)



» The Starfox mothership can be warped to any friendly planet giving a tactical advantage and is used to replenish shields



» Alternative pilots to Fox can be selected including two new arrivals Miyu the lynx and Fay the dog



» This map screen brings an element of real-time strategy with freeform missions that evolve during battle sequences!

When *Starfox* was released in 1993 the Super FX-enhanced game immediately impressed gamers with its stunning visuals, gripping gameplay and operatic storyline. SNES owners duly lapped it up and while it can now be picked up for next to nothing, special editions like the *Starwing Super Weekend Competition* cartridge still sell for outrageous prices on the likes of eBay.

With its gorgeous panoramic landscapes and dynamic screen-filling boss encounters it should have come as no surprise that Nintendo decided to plough ahead with development on a sequel, and this time it was going to make good with the few faults that the original game had suffered from – namely its on-rails design. As *Starfox 2* lead programmer Dylan Cuthbert points out, *Starfox 2* was to be vastly different. "The *Starfox* franchise has never really been about shooting-on-rails, it's always been about giving the player a fun new 3D sci-fi experience," he insists. "It was originally put on rails simply because we didn't have the CPU power to populate a full 3D arena in enough detail." The second-generation SuperFX chip was set to change all that and would provide the means to create a rich 3-dimensional environment for the exciting and promising sequel.

Slowly, but ever so surely, a trickle of information and screenshots began to reach the media, with early prototype carts hitting tradeshows such as the LA-based videogame mecca E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo). Sadly, with all the excitement generated by the introduction of the new 32-bit consoles, interest in *Starfox 2* began to wane and by the 1995 CES (Consumer Electronic Show) Nintendo's sequel looked set to become another lost gaming relic.

THE BETA ROM

That was until an anonymous source approached key members of the emulation community, most noticeably one known as 'The Dumper'. "I was contacted discreetly by someone who had a non-working copy of what most people today refer to as the *Starfox 2* Final Beta ROM," he explains. "This was not a ROM dump but an image from one of the development environments of the game that had been found somewhere." Unfortunately, emulation of the ROM proved ropey at best, "This person thought that perhaps the reason it wasn't working was that emulation of the SuperFX chip wasn't complete and maybe I could help get it working," 'The Dumper' continues. "It only took a short time looking at the image to realise that a section was actually absent. An internal header in the middle of the ROM containing data such as the name, part number, checksums – it was this part that was missing."



» Andross makes a return in *Starfox 2*, despatching two Cannon Betrayers to do battle with Corneria



» The Mirage Dragon carries an awesome beam weapon inflicting massive shield damage alongside a fireball barrage

Inspired by the discovery of *Starfox 2*, emulation of the SuperFX chip advanced to the point where the ROM is playable in both ZSNES and Snes9x, although not without some drawbacks. For the best tactile feel and with the correct expertise it's possible to create working *Starfox 2* carts, something 'The Dumper' pleads guilty to: "The game looked so cool that I just had to build a proper cartridge for it. Of course, for a normal game this would have been relatively easy, but with *Starfox 2* this was no small undertaking. Luckily, the new assembly did all fit under the hood of a standard SNES cart. I plugged it into my SNES, flicked on the power and BAM, *Starfox 2*!"



» Andross barks orders to his Cannon Betrayers threatening Corneria with the planet cannon.



» Starfox triumph over Starwolf with another of their number reduced to dust.

TIME ATTACK

Through Emulation the Final Beta ROM opens with the Nintendo logo ablaze, with the camera panning across to the Corneria space armada being torn apart by, the enemy, the Mirage Dragon. Summoned into service once again, Team Starfox warp their mothership into action where the menu screen greets you and the mission gets under way. It has three difficulty settings: Normal, Hard and Expert, each offering a varying level of challenge. Opting for the Normal mode presents you with two motherships from Andross' fleet called Cannon Betrayers and an equal number of planetary bases to defeat. Select the Expert level and Team Starfox is confronted with four Cannon Betrayers and three bases with a greater variety of enemies – from mine layers, to missiles of exotic design to destroy, before moving onto the final battle with Andross. The variation in each level is not limited to an increase in enemy numbers, however, as the environment/puzzles become more diverse. A challenge mastered in Normal mode becomes quite a different beast on the expert setting.

After selecting a difficulty level you'll discover two new members of Team Starfox, Miyu and Fay, each character offering different strengths and weaknesses through the various craft they fly. They show variations in speed/agility, shield strength and possess an assortment of special weapons. After selecting one pilot along with a wingman you're shown the map screen where you learn that defending Corneria from the invading forces is your primary mission. Here an element of strategy is introduced: do you destroy the base firing the missiles or the Cannon Betrayer launching waves of fighter squadrons? This is where *Starfox 2* really shines – even during battle sequences time is a crucial factor. Take too long in a dogfight and that missile which had started two systems away can get uncomfortably close…

This evolving interplay of time and strategy is key to the gameplay of *Starfox 2* and was intended to offer a level of replayability – as Dylan elaborates, "In the real version, the timing and appearance of enemies was completely random. The point of *Starfox 2* was for you to replay the same mission repeatedly but to get a different experience each time – thus increasing the play time enormously." Surprise is all part of the gameplay as demonstrated in the Final Beta ROM. Dealing with a squadron of enemy fighters the action can be interrupted by any number of factors, including Team Starwolf warping into the arena or the troublesome Mirage Dragon appearing, amongst a host of other unscripted events!



» As with Cannon Betrayers the core of a planetary base needs to be destroyed before the installation falls liberating the system

STEP IN THE RING

From a cockpit perspective space warfare is frantic and engaging, drawing you deeper into the *Starfox* universe, with battle chatter and reports popping up onto the HUD. The HUD is designed to avoid interference with gameplay. Contributing little to skirmishes the wingman acts as a form of in-game tutor advising you in tactical play or briefing the current mission. Outside of battle sequences the wingman can be interchanged for the main pilot bringing a fresh ship into proceedings and a different skill set depending whom you selected at the start.

The freedom offered during dogfights is a welcome departure from the original and includes the option to morph into a walking Mech during land-based assaults. These ground levels introduce a basic but effective puzzle element, where you will need to explore the play area to activate switches or destroy shields before entering the base. Then you'll be navigating a typical corridor-style maze in pursuit of the core, which must be destroyed to liberate the planet from Andross' occupation and to stop the launch of further missiles destined for Corneria. Dylan gives his insight, "There was a lot of experimentation that went into *Starfox 2* where we had a robot walker and platforms you could jump onto and between. Collision detection was quite advanced for the time. We tried out a great many ideas; there were probably three or four versions of the arena-based play until we decided on the main type, and then we re-used the ideas from our experiments in the dungeons – ie. the base part of the stage." This shift in gameplay was a conscious decision for the sequel: "There were a few bosses built into the dungeons, but they were more gimmicky or puzzle-based than before; that part of the game had similarities to *Zelda*. *Starfox 2* was less of a shooting game in comparison to all the bosses in the original *Starfox*, which were shooting-game type bosses".

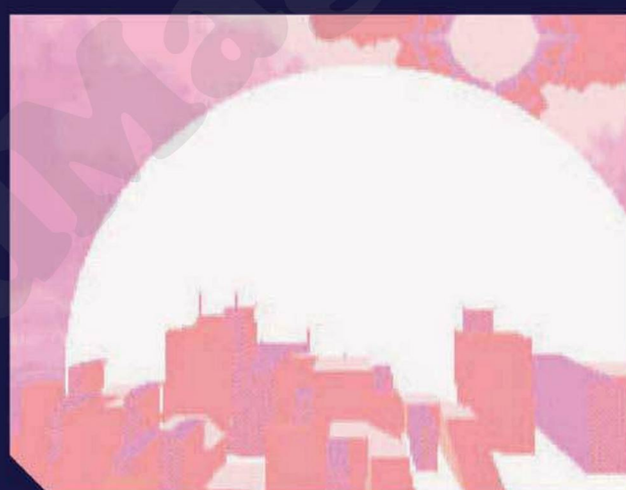
With the explosive on-screen action and from the first rumblings of the Cannon

TWO'S COMPANY

The Final Beta ROM is not the only version of *Starfox 2* available, with several early builds leaked. Inevitably, these consisted of debug menus and sparsely populated landscapes. One example includes a two-player mode: implementing a split-screen window, this offered versus matches against a human opponent in various arenas including Ground, Space and Desert environments. Dylan elaborates on the decision to cut this feature, "We couldn't get the frame rate good enough for it to feel like a rich level. The dogfight worked but the 1Vs1 mode wasn't that much fun. For the N64 they managed to get four players working and that made a big difference."


» Two-player mode was dropped in favour of the richer environments offered through the main single-player game

"A LOT OF THE EXPERIMENTATION WE DID FOR STARFOX 2 HELPED MIYAMOTO FORM IDEAS FOR MARIO 64" DYLAN CUTHBERT, LEAD PROGRAMMER

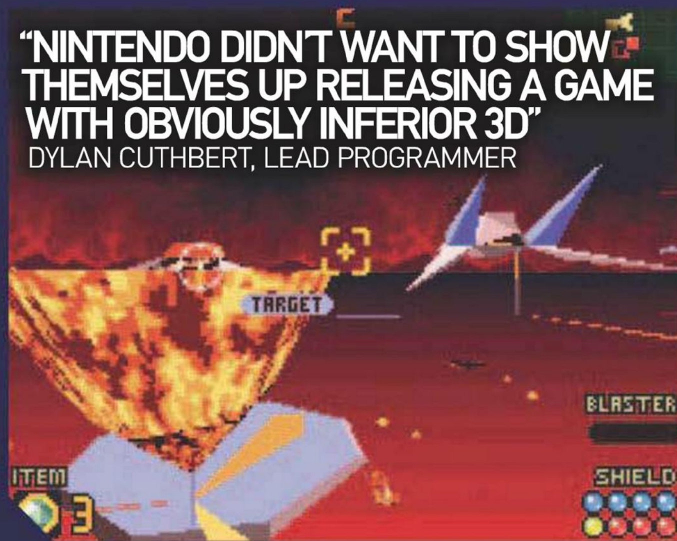

» Andross' forces prevail with the destruction of Corneria

STARFOX 2



» The stomping block was alive and well before *Mario 64* and just goes to show how *Starfox 2* influenced the development of Miyamoto's masterpiece

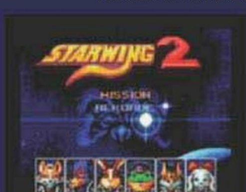
"NINTENDO DIDN'T WANT TO SHOW THEMSELVES UP RELEASING A GAME WITH OBVIOUSLY INFERIOR 3D"
DYLAN CUTHBERT, LEAD PROGRAMMER



» Introducing puzzle elements: your Arwing needs a perfect landing on this moving platform to avoid the lava flows running beneath

TRANSLATION PATCH

A translation patch for the prototypes ROM can be found through Aeon Genesis (**http://agtp.romhack.net**) converting the Japanese to English. The project took over 100 hours of work, Gideon curator of AG recounts, "Four people were involved in the production of the English version: myself as lead hacker, whose focus was text-dumping and replacement with some low-level assembly work, d4s as an assembly-level hacker and graphic artist, FuSoYa as the resident compression guru, and status on the translation of the actual text". The team released a second patch removing debug information and fixing menu screens. Gideon gives an example, "The most interesting aspect of the debug patch was allowing Corneria to take damage. All of the routines were in place to allow this, but it was multiplying the resulting number by zero, nullifying any damage that the planet would take. It was a simple matter of changing that multiplier into another number".



» **Only the German translation patch features a renamed *Starwing 2* logo, rumours of hidden *Starfox* beach towels go unconfirmed!**

Betrayer's engines you know *Starfox 2* is going to be an audio/visual spectacle. As gameplay shifts from menus and map-screens to battle scenarios, the music plays seamlessly and even offers audio cues, including a well-implemented frenetic tone of urgency following any damage to Corneria. The trend of audio association continues with intrusions of Team Starwolf, to the deployment of the devastating Planet Cannons. The composition is flawless from the introductory sequence to the ending credits; everything fits perfectly and truly suits the space opera that is *Starfox 2*.

OUT-FOXED

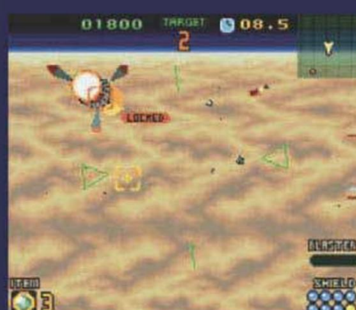
Revolutionary to the SNES, *Starfox 2* couldn't compete with the new 3D games at that time. Dylan reflects, "The rate at which 3D technology was developing was just too fast. Whilst we were making *Starfox 2* the PlayStation and Saturn had launched. Nintendo didn't want to show themselves up releasing a game with inferior 3D, especially as the original *Starfox* had been leagues ahead of the competition."

Whilst it's common knowledge that certain elements made it over to the N64 reincarnation of the series in *Starfox 64* (*Lylat Wars* in Europe), probably less well known is the fact *Starfox 2* provided vital experience for the production of 3D games. Dylan adds, "Miyamoto and Eguchi wanted to experiment with a deeper platformer/*Zelda* like experience. A lot of the experimentation we did for *Starfox 2* helped Miyamoto form ideas for *Mario 64*." While solace can be taken in the fact it helped mould one of the greatest games ever created in *Mario 64*, it's a shame that the masses never got to enjoy *Starfox 2*. A true realisation of the SuperFX chips power, it was far superior to the original, combining typical *Starfox* action with an RTS element that was poised to invigorate the franchise.

As Argonaut's SuperFX technology opened up new possibilities it also sealed the fate for the doomed *Starfox 2* project, confronted with 3D visuals from other consoles outstripping that of the augmented SNES. Thanks to the continued support of the emulation community from projects such as Aeon Genesis, it's possible to get a glimpse at these hidden gems and enjoy the gaming experience as it was intended to be. The *Starfox 2* Final Beta ROM feels and plays like a finished game and can easily be found online if one were so inclined. Both ZSNES and Snes9x are happy to play the ROM; alternatively you could build your own *Starfox 2* prototype cartridge where it's reported to run without fault on the original hardware! Well worth further investigation, the game never fails to surprise and is one of the few gaming relics to be unearthed and given a new lease of life.



» After falling under Andross' control the Cornerian defensive satellite cannon takes aim as you attempt to regain control…



» Sucking on the exhaust fumes in hot pursuit of an enemy missile, the action never eases off in *Starfox 2*!



» *Starfox 2* box art featured in a US electronics boutique ad, it's rumoured full-scale billboard ads were distributed to retailers

SPECIAL THANKS

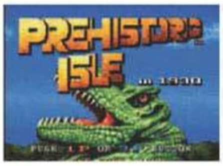
Thanks go to Evan for use of the gimped Starfox 2 box art, check out **http://snescentral.edgeemu.com** for more SNES oddities. With special mention of *Starfox* Fans **www.starfoxfans.com** worth a browse for tradeshow event pictures of *Starfox 2* and more besides.

BOSS/RUSH

WHEN WE SQUARE UP TO THAT END-OF-LEVEL BADDIE FROM YESTERYEAR...

EVERYTHING IN PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

GAME INFO



- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PUBLISHER:** SNK
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE



» Since when did herbivore mean 'to eat planes'?



» The allosaurus has quite a jump on him so stay as high as you possibly can.



» Ignore the beautifully scrolling parallax clouds and just try to stay alive.

Back in 1989, SNK came up with the idea to take its latest shoot-'em-up and replace all the enemies that would usually appear with a dazzling variety of dinosaurs – including some great reptilian bosses. Genius.

Take the first mid-level mayor you face off against, for example. It's a brachiosaurus that uses its long neck to lash out at your bi-plane and catch it within its huge jaws. Alright, so SNK obviously didn't study natural history too thoroughly (we can't imagine any herbivorous dinosaur wanting to chow down on a hunk of metal), but you can't deny how effective the threatening sauropod looked.

Still, there was worse to come. Clocking in at five tons and 93 feet, the allosaurus was your first real challenge – a challenge that was further exacerbated when he ran straight towards you at a terrifying pace, leaving you with next to no room to escape.

After taking to the skies and shooting down enough pterodactyls to make the species extinct, it was time to deal with their bigger cousin – a rhamphorhynchus, which used a whirlwind attack to draw your ship towards it.

This was nothing compared to the creation that appeared at the halfway point of level three. Consisting of a huge head attached to a tiny snake-like body, the reptile defied the laws of physics by floating in the air and belching out streams of fire. The weirdness continued upon reaching the bone-filled lair of Coleoptera, a giant, heavily armoured insect that split into smaller beasties the more you damaged it.

With two more aberrations of nature defeated, *Prehistoric Isle* took on a nautical theme as your bi-plane transformed into a nifty little sub and continued the fight under the seas and your first denizen of the deep – a gigantic sea turtle. Extremely tough, thanks to its huge shell, the archelon made your task all the more difficult by flinging scores of baby turtles at you. A quick breather and your little sub came face to face with an ammonite. Like the brachiosaurus, reach was on the shelled creature's side and it could catch you in its extendable claws and pull you towards its beak.

The final stage saw the text books, again, thrown out the window when you met the mid-point boss, an angry-looking stegosaur. Fortunately, his bark was far worse than his bite and he proved to be one of *Prehistoric Isle*'s weaker adversaries.

The T-Rex, however, was definitely the yang to the stegosaur's yin, and proved to be a horrifying foe. Several screens high and with a devastating fireball attack, it had more lives than the average house cat and required an insane amount of ten pence pieces to beat. In fact, he's so tough, we've been far too scared to play the sequel.

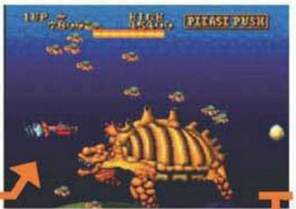
WE CAN'T IMAGINE ANY HERBIVOROUS DINOSAUR WANTING TO CHOW DOWN ON A HUNK OF METAL



» Oh come on, SNK, you're not even trying now. What the hell is this supposed to be?



» That's one big cockroach… sadly, giant cans of bug spray haven't been invented yet.



» "If I don't save the wee turtles who will? Aghh! Save me from the wee turtles.



» If you claim to be able to kill this T-Rex with one credit, you're obviously a big fat dirty liar.



» SNK once again ignores the history books. The number of meat-eating herbivores is truly shocking.



» It's not much to look at but this ammonite has a huge reach..

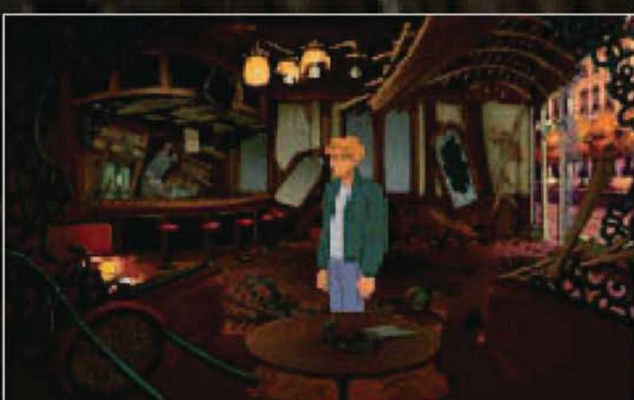
THE MAKING OF...

BROKEN SWORD

Ten years before Dan Brown sparked controversy with The Da Vinci Code, Revolution Software's Broken Sword explored the legend of the Knights Templar. Director Charles Cecil tells David Crookes just why he decided to create this historical adventure



» *Broken Sword* was ported onto the Game Boy Advance in 2002.



IT WOULD be wrong to suggest that point-and-click adventure games are dead. Better to say that amid the scorching driving games, frantic first-person shooters and soil-your-pants survival horrors is a genre of gaming that has been sound asleep – with no developer appearing all that willing to wake it up.

Around ten years ago, however, they were hugely popular. And among the games causing a stir was *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars*, a title created by Charles Cecil, boss of the highly acclaimed developer Revolution Software. Indeed, such was *Broken Sword*'s popularity it has spawned three sequels.

The original, *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars* introduced US law graduate George Stobbart and French journalist Nico Collard and took the player on an adventure that transcended the globe and drew in more than its fair share of cults, murder and conspiracies, all laden thick with the hand of the Knights Templar. In what, in hindsight, looks like a precursor to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, *Broken Sword* was ahead of its time.

Charles was certainly a fan of adventure games and had knocked out three text-only titles – *Inca Curse* and *Espionage Island* in 1981 and *Ship Of Doom* a year later – while studying mechanical engineering at the University of Manchester.

They were sold via student friend Matt Wallace's games firm, Artic Computing, and encouraged Charles to establish Paragon Programming, a gaming development company that worked with US Gold, upon his graduation in 1985. Two years later, he became US Gold's Software development manager before being approached by Activision to manage its European Development Studio.

But then, in 1990, he decided to go back to his roots and he set up Revolution Software.

At this time, Charles was taken by the point-and-click interface mastered in 1990 by LucasArts' *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, a classic game with a fantastic script.

He realised the possibilities that lay ahead and took on board the principles of point-and-click for *Lure Of The Temptress*, Revolution's debut title. The game took two years to make and cost between £20,000 and £30,000.





» George Stobbart often struggled to get any sense from the French police.



» To mark the tenth anniversary of *Broken Sword* this year, Astraware joined forces with Revolution to produce a version of the first *Broken Sword* for PalmOS and Windows Mobile devices. "We always dreamed of writing the game on a device that would reach beyond hardcore gamers, with the emphasis on intelligent, cerebral gameplay, rather than the requirement for manual dexterity," says Charles.

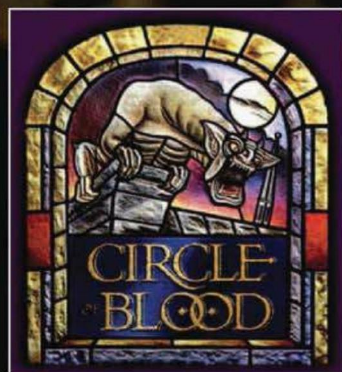
Charles, as director, constructed it with precision, combining elements of fantasy and comedy to such perfection that Virgin Interactive Entertainment was only too happy to snap it up, publishing it for the Atari ST, PC and Amiga.

"*Lure Of The Temptress* was certainly the beginning of what would become the *Broken Sword* story," says Charles. *Temptress* was followed up by science fiction adventure *Beneath A Steel Sky* in 1994 for the PC and Amiga. And then Charles read the controversial book *Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*.

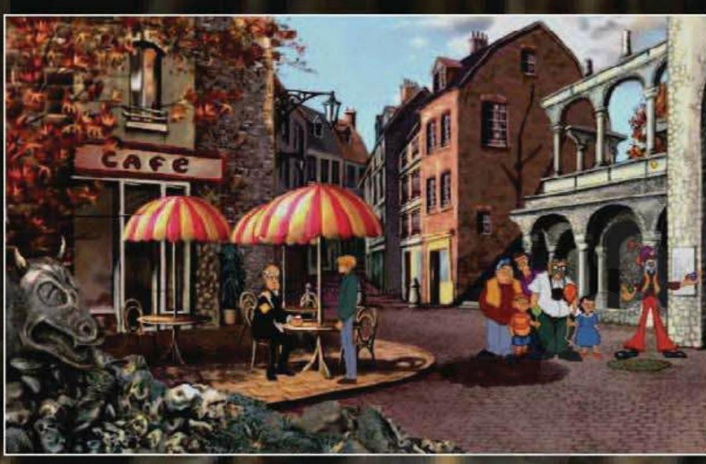
Authors Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln argued there was evidence that Jesus married Mary Magdalene. The book claimed the pair had one or more children who had emigrated to what is now the south of France and that a secret society called the Priory of Sion was set up to keep the 'truth' alive, creating the Knights Templar, their military and financial wing.

Charles became fascinated by the conspiracy theories and he decided his next game would be based upon them.

"I was looking for a subject which could bring in elements of humour but was predominantly based upon drama," he continues. "The most successful adventure games at the time were centred on humour, like *Monkey Island*, but I wanted to depart from that, to create a game that had good pacing and a storyline that seemed real and involved. That's why I felt the Knight Templars would be a great subject. It felt fresh – this was ten years ago when it was hard to find details of the Knight Templars and few people had heard of them. After reading *Holy Blood And The Holy Grail* I felt there was enough history with the Templars to make it a good subject on which to base a game."



» *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars* was called *Circle Of Blood* in America.



» The colourful, cartoon-style graphics attracted much acclaim from reviewers.



» Charles Cecil is the co-founder and managing director of Revolution Software.

IN THE KNOW



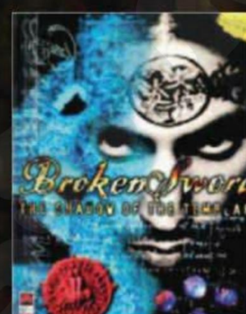
» **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

» **DEVELOPER:** REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

» **RELEASED:** 1996 PC AND PLAYSTATION, 2002 GBA

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

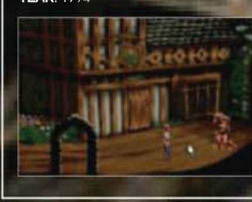
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £4.99 (IN PACK WITH *BROKEN SWORD 2*)



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS
(PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
YEAR: 1992

BENEATH A STEEL SKY
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMIGA CD32, PC
YEAR: 1994



THE MAKING OF... BROKEN SWORD

POINTING THE WAY

Charles Cecil once infamously said point-and-click adventure games were dead. And he indeed dropped it as a concept in the series' third game, *The Sleeping Dragon*. So why has he resurrected it for *The Angel Of Death*? He says: "I brought it back for *Broken Sword 4* after deciding to give people a choice. And what I meant when I said point-and-click was dead was that the genre was dead and not the interface.

"Classic point-and-click games will not come back but in *Broken Sword 4*, we have a point-and-click element. Some people love direct control and others do not.

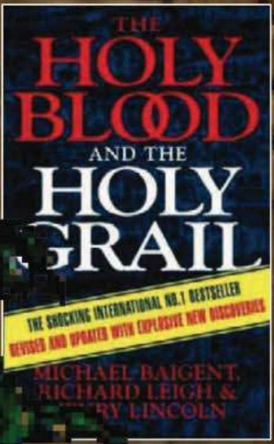
"There was a lot of ill-feeling with *Broken Sword 3* not having point-and-click and I could see their point. I like point-and-click myself and with *Broken Sword 4* we have achieved a middle ground."



» Shedding his trademark jeans for a spell, George becomes a bogus doctor in his quest for the truth.



» Was George hiding from Nico? No, it was just a daring stunt – one of many George had to face.



» The controversial book that started a thousand careers and led to the creation of both *The Da Vinci Code* and *Broken Sword*, was *The Holy Blood And The Holy Grail*.



» *Broken Sword* is full of reference to the Knights Templar myth.

Once he had finished the book, he began to scribble down some ideas with scriptwriters Dave Cummins and Jonathan Howard and he decided he wanted to continue with the point-and-click theme of his two earlier efforts. His desire was to create a cinematic style for the new game while keeping faith with the traditional structure of adventure titles. By doing this, he mused, he would avoid going down the path that the glut of interactive movies had trodden in the early 1990s.

"When *Broken Sword* came out, we were riding on the back of these interactive movies," he says. "They were a disaster. The people knocking them out were being blinded – they wanted to rub shoulders with movie stars and producers and the gaming elements were lost. They were out of touch with games. Of course, I am interested in film scriptwriting and I felt then and still do that there can be parallels with games. I felt we needed to learn from the movies with *Broken Sword* but not mimic them. It was my intention to make *Broken Sword* cinematic, with great gameplay."

After making his final decision upon the theme, Charles jumped on a plane to conduct a spot of research. "I visited Paris, going around the catacombs and checking out locations and sights," he said. "It's important to get references like this and I've done it with all of the games I have written. In actual fact, each game I have produced has reflected areas of life I'm interested in or places I have been to.

"For instance, *Broken Sword 3* was set in the Congo. I was brought up there and had to leave under the bloody revolution so to create a game with that setting was very personal to me."

Once he arrived back, he began to formulate the way the game would run and, as with his early games, he decided again to take full control – "someone has to have a vision in their head, of the characters, the story."

His first decision was to make the game believable. "Believability is key and is preferable to out and out realism," he says. "The characters had to be motivated, as we would expect in real life, and everything – right down to the smaller touches like the background lighting – had to be dramatic but not out of place.

"The same was true of the puzzles. We had to be very careful and so we went through lots of them, seeing which ones would be fun. These drive the story on, providing rewards as the players goes along, so we had to get them right."

"I'M NEVER HAPPY WITH MY GAMES; I ALWAYS LOOK AT HOW THEY'RE RECEIVED" CHARLES CECIL



» Despite the sinister world George was heading into, it sure took him to some nice places.

Charles wrote the cutscenes and dialogue first and approached Australian composer Barrington Pheloung (known for creating the theme to *Inspector Morse*) for the music. "Our approach was not dissimilar to a film writer's approach to a movie. We got the cutscenes and dialogue done early in the process and from then on, we tweaked it. One of the earliest decisions was to make sure the player felt as involved as possible, so we made sure any cutscenes were short and came at the right time."

One of the most important things, however, was to get the first scenes right. Not only is this vital to draw the player into the adventure, but Revolution created many demos for magazine cover discs allowing the first scene to be played for free – a bad introduction and the whole project would have gone to waste.

Charles created an explosive opening scene. With the opening titles out of the way, the camera pans down through the Paris skyline and on to the street, revealing George having a coffee at a quiet Parisian cafe. A man dressed as a clown bounds in, places an accordion on a seat inside the cafe and dashes out. The accordion contains a massive bomb, which explodes, leaving a quizzical George to dust himself down and use the remainder of his vacation to investigate the crime by travelling to Ireland, Spain, Syria and Scotland.

"There are two ways to start a game. You can give lots of background about a character and what he or she is doing or you can start in a way that is outside the player's control and that's what I wanted," Charles continues. "I thought that since the player controlled the character and associated with him or her, that I could afford to start a game without giving away a great deal about that character. So in the first scene, I didn't want a long exposition. George is drawn into the plot unwillingly, having been caught up in an explosion and he wants to do the right thing in finding out what was behind it. Nico comes in after around ten minutes – just as we wanted from the beginning."

"BROKEN SWORD 3 WAS SET IN THE CONGO. I WAS BROUGHT UP THERE AND HAD TO LEAVE UNDER THE BLOODY REVOLUTION, SO IT MEANT A LOT TO ME" CHARLES CECIL

So why was Nico created? Charles explains: "When I created the game, I decided that there would be two characters – a man and a woman – and the idea was that they would be our protagonists, exchanging thoughts and ideas between themselves, helping to drive the game along. It meant we didn't need to have lengthy one-man dialogues or the need for 30 minutes of cutscenes. As for why I made George American and Nico French, I wanted to appeal to the US and European markets. Of course, it's also more exotic for an Englishman like myself to write a storyline involving people of different nationalities. I thought George would help us corner the American market but, in the end, the game did particularly well in Europe, especially Germany."

George's character is soon established. His sarcastic and passive nature marks him out as a friendly, curious, yet rather average, intelligent American with a penchant for wearing jeans and ensuring his blond hair is short at the back and long at the front. Nico is a beautiful brunette, more forthright and driven, yet also sarcastic and, in George's eyes anyway, too friendly with André Lobineau, a French history scholar.

As the game progresses, it becomes obvious that there could be a spark of chemistry between George and Nico. Charles laughs: "There was a question over Nico being George's love interest. We could very easily have had them having sex but that would have ruined the relationship between these people."

George was voiced by US actor Rolf Saxon and he has continued in that role for all four games. Actress Rachel Atkins voiced Nico in the debut game but she was replaced by Flaminia Cinque for *Broken Sword II: The Smoking Mirror*, Sarah Crook in *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* and Katherine Pageon in the latest instalment, *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death*.



» A historical trip such as the one on which George embarked would inevitably see him pop into a museum.

Why use so many different actresses? "I've never had a bad Nico, but I've never had one I've been happy with," Charles explains. "I have been pleased with Rolf Saxon's George, though. He has made the part his own."

With a final cost of £1 million, *Broken Sword* was certainly not cheap. But not everything was rosy. The game may have been a phenomenal success on the PC but its debut on the PlayStation was less successful. The lack of a mouse meant control was difficult.

"My one big regret was the PlayStation version," says Charles. "No one thought that it would sell, so we kept it like the PC version. In hindsight, I think if we had introduced direct control in this game, it would have been enormous. But to be honest, I'm never happy with my games and I always look at how they are being received."

But with reviewers gushing in their praise on *Broken Sword*'s debut he had every reason to be happy.

SPECIAL THANKS TO Mobygames.com for several important images

DA BROKEN SWORD

The similarities between *Broken Sword* and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* are startling.

So what does Charles think about Dan Brown making billions of pounds from a similar concept to *Broken Sword* – American man, French woman, Knights Templar, religious conspiracies…

"*The Da Vinci Code* is very similar to *Broken Sword*," says Charles. "There's an American guy and French girl; it involves the Knight Templars. I would be flattered to think Dan Brown had played *Broken Sword* – we had both, however, read *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*."

Could a *Broken Sword* film be on the cards? "We get approached about making a *Broken Sword* film from time to time," he reveals. "But if it was a bad film, it would kill the franchise. I would only be interested if I could see it would be a good job."

Such is Charles' fascination with the Knights Templar, he was called to write a high-level précis for *The Da Vinci Code* game.



» George's reaction on the news that *Broken Sword 3* would be in 3D was priceless…



» Cutscenes such as these – in which George talks on the phone – help to drive the narrative.



» The quest for truth took George to all sorts of strange places…



» George in a hospital, which looks a world apart from a British NHS one.



» George meets some of Paris' colourful life.

SUPER BOMBERMAN

TICK, TICK, TICK, TICK, BOOM!



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+

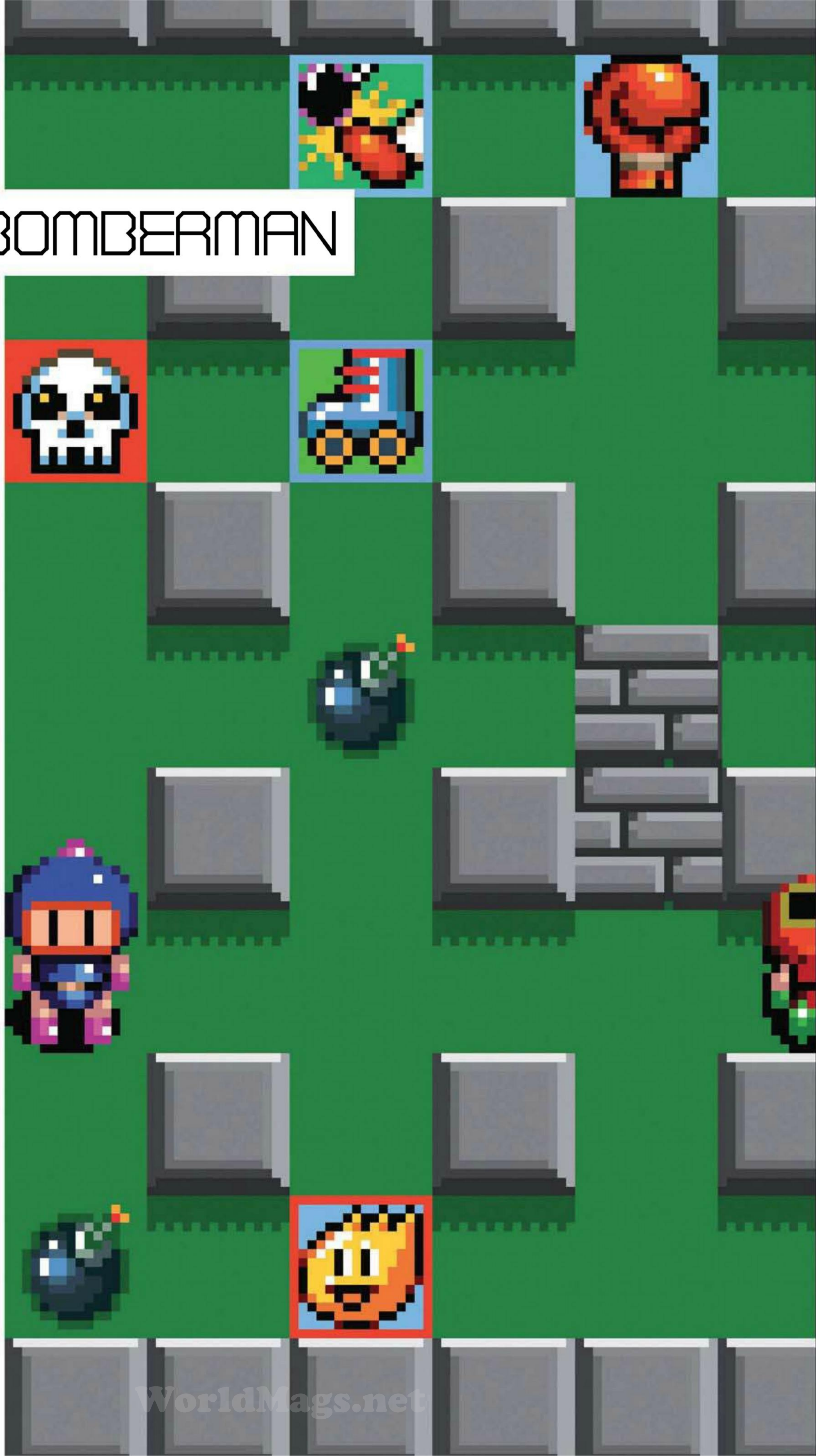


HISTORY

It can safely be said that people rarely play *Bomberman* for its single-player experience. Despite the odd exception – Saturn *Bomberman*'s RPG-esque adventure immediately springs to mind – ploughing through *Bomberman* on your own is a soulless experience and about as exciting as filling out a tax form.

So why then has *Bomberman* managed to survive cockroach-like over the years (it's now 24-years-old) when other franchises, which are more enjoyable to play, have withered and died by the wayside like a bouquet of week-old flowers that someone forgot to water? Simple. It just so happens to be blessed with one of the greatest multi-player experiences this side of the Saturn's excellent *Death Tank* (Google it, if you don't know what I'm talking about).

Taking place in a confined arena, the idea behind *Bomberman*'s 'battle mode' has always been simplicity itself: lay bombs and blow up your opponent until you're the last (Bomber) man standing. Initially starting off in separate corners of the screen you'd quickly start blowing up walls, which would hopefully yield an extra bomb or other useful power-up for you to totally humiliate your opponents with. As the playing area decreased in size and the length of each bomb's explosion grew, it soon became a frantic game of cat and mouse that saw you trying to avoid the trails of explosions while trying to trick an enemy into making a fatal error before you yourself faltered. Once you were able to stun an enemy with a well-kicked bomb, or better yet, use that well-kicked bomb to trap your hapless foe into a corner the feeling of elation was quite possibly unmatched by any other game. Even the firmest of friends could become instant enemies after a brief spell in Battle Mode, and with more new versions on the way, those rivalries could no doubt extend for another quarter of a decade.

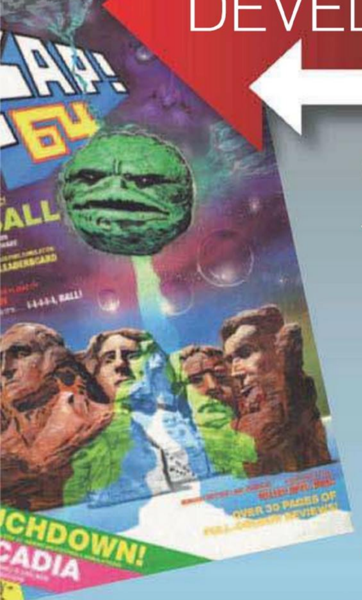






DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

SENSIBLE SOFTWARE



SENSIBLE SOFTWARE LASTED FOR 13 YEARS. TOGETHER, JON HARE AND CHRIS YATES PRODUCED SOME OF VIDEOGAMING'S FINEST TITLES, FROM WIZBALL TO CANNON FODDER TO SENSIBLE SOCCER, AND QUITE A FEW IN BETWEEN. JON TAKES DAVID CROOKES DOWN MEMORY LANE.

IN BRIEF

Jon Hare and Chris Yates meet at school and form a band. They also get jobs together at a company called LT Software. Eventually they decide there is more money in creating games, consigning their music to a hobby. They produce *Twister: Mother Of Charlotte* for System 3 before deciding to go it alone, forming Sensible Software. The pair create lots of games primarily for the Commodore 64 and Amiga, including the brilliant *Sensible Soccer*, *Wizball* and *Cannon Fodder*. But the shift to 3D games proves difficult and they eventually sell Sensi to Codemasters.

The heat was sweltering. Hundreds of sweaty people were milling around and computers were turned on all around the building. To entertain them there was a sizeable number of largely unfinished games, but putting a smile on some faces was a group of scantily clad girls. They, it seemed, had found a way to cool down. Then they began to dance. And the brows of the organisers of this 1985 PCW show began to furrow. Droplets of water swept down their faces. They had a situation on their hands and it was all too much, too vulgar.

In what would go down as one of the most memorable moments in videogaming history the girls were ushered towards the door. And, Mark Cale, the founder of fledgling publisher System 3, had just won a huge slice of publicity.

Cale had been using the girls to promote the storyline of *Twister: Mother Of Charlotte* (a change of name from the rather more controversial Mother Of Harlots), a game created by Jon Hare and Chris Yates, the soon-to-be founders of Sensible Software. The scantily clad had long been used to attract attention and loosen purse strings in other industries, but this was the first time it had been used so blatantly in videogaming.

Then again, this was a time for firsts. For it was also the first time Jon and Chris had got together as a pair to create a game.

"*Twister* was a bit controversial," admits Mr Hare. "We were asked to change the title of it because otherwise it was felt it wouldn't have made it on to the shelves of some shops if we didn't.

"And then there was the issue of the girls. Mark had this idea of getting girls with large breasts to promote the game.

"But the thing that sticks in my mind was that the show was also being used to show off *International Karate* and there were guys smashing breeze blocks with their hands.

"Shards of broken breeze blocks were littering the stage and the girls were complaining that they couldn't walk around properly in



their high heels and bare feet because it was becoming dangerous." *Twister* proved to be a landmark game for Jon and Chris although the game proved to be a letdown in the sense it only made it to the Spectrum, with the Atari ST, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC versions never having got to the finishing stages.

"To be honest, I can't quite remember why we didn't create the game for those other formats. They just didn't happen. What was most notable, though, was that it was the first time Chris and I had worked together on a game," says Jon. "And the money we earned from that game helped us to set up Sensible Software."

Sensible Software was created in March, 1986 and it marked a new journey for school pals Jon and Chris. The pair had left school to go to work for the same company – LT Software in Basildon – where, during the nine months they were employed there, they had produced a Spectrum version of the Commodore 64 game *Gandalf*, called *Sodov The Sorceror*, a title greeted with moderate success.

Working as part of a team on that game they began to see their potential at creating games as well as music, and their creative partnership and friendship soon realigned itself to become a two-man start-up development team.

"We went to the same school at Great Baddow, Chelmsford, Essex, and met when we were in the fifth form", says Jon. "We were going to a *Rush* gig with friends. I went with a mate of mine and he went with a mate of his and both our mates knew each other.

"Chris and I ended up talking and we realised we both liked the same kinds of music. We were also in the same maths class, although I hadn't really spoken to him before that.

"We ended up forming a band together, going through loads of names – Zeus, Deus, Hamsterfish, Dark Globe (which we used for three years – it was named after a Syd Barrett track). Then we become the Amazing Technicolour Dream Globe, then finally Touchstone. Every time we changed the line-up we changed the name of the band, and we kept going until about 1991.

"Initially, the music came first and games came second. But we found it hard to make a lot of money in music, so it became a hobby and the games became more important to us."

Jon's work on *Sodov The Sorceror* brought him to the attention of System 3's Cale and he was contracted to produce the graphics for the developer's *International Karate* game. Things didn't go too well and the project was later handed to Archer Maclean. He ripped the entire game apart and started again from scratch, eventually producing one of the most acclaimed games in history.

Work continued for Jon, however, mainly on converting *Skyfox*, *RMS Titanic* and *Lone Wolf* for the Spectrum. Jon and Chris then got together to produce *Twister*. Although it was not branded Sensible Software – Cale decided to rebadge it with his System 3 logo – the Sensi pair inserted a keypress that called up the Sensible Software credit.

"We were young – only 19 – and having a laugh. What wasn't funny, though, was that we discovered we got only 15 per cent of the money paid to LT Software for *Twister*, even though we did virtually all of the work. From that point on, we decided we would need to negotiate future deals ourselves and we made sure we didn't make the same mistake again."

ZZAP - THE GAME DIED

Sensible Soccer had a close relationship with many magazines, particularly with Zzap!64. Jon and Chris agreed to a competition in Zzap!64 in which readers were asked to think of a name for an *Elite*-style shooter with filled-in vectors initially called *The Day The Universe Died*.

"We had a good working relationship with the guys at Zzap!64 (I shared a house with Gary Liddon and Gary Penn at one time) and we thought the naming competition would be a great idea," says Jon.

"In the end, though, the game died. We just decided not to continue it, which, I suppose, looking back, was a shame."

Zzap!64 and Sensible certainly did not fall out over the matter. The magazine, quite rightly, gave the Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit a Gold Medal and Jon subsequently wrote a two-part guide to the utility.

"WHAT WASN'T FUNNY WAS THAT WE GOT ONLY 15 PER CENT OF THE MONEY PAID TO LT SOFTWARE FOR TWISTER, EVEN THOUGH WE DID VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE WORK"



» Although it only received 66% in Amiga Power, *Sensible Golf* was still a fun take on the sport.

» *Sensible Soccer* lives on in a plug-and-play format.

In actual fact, it was at this point Jon and Chris decided to make their own way in the industry. First stop – the dole.

"As soon as we finished *Twister*, we began looking at the government's enterprise scheme, which helped fledgling companies. We had to be on the dole for 13 weeks and have £1,000 each in the bank to be eligible, though, so we signed on and a little over three months later we got Sensible Software off the ground."

In the meantime, the pair converted *Runestone* to the C64, again for LT Software, although in the end it was never published.

Soon after setting up Sensible Software in March 1986, the pair took a demo of the work up to the Manchester-based software house, Ocean Software. It was their first attempt to sell something to a publisher and they got it signed up that same day.

"It was pretty much an immediate success for us," recalls Jon. "It was a great break so we signed, even though it was a terrible contract. We knew no better in those days."

"We finished that game – *Parallax* – over six months. It was our first proper Sensible game but, in hindsight, we rushed the end of it. The adventure side of the game could have been bigger.

"We wanted to do more, but time and memory just held us back."

After they completed *Parallax*, they knocked out a game for Firebird (where, incidentally, Jon met his wife, Irene), a budget release called *Galaxibirds*. It was a joke version of the arcade game *Galaxian;* the player had to shoot strange-looking geese and other birds. The pair wrote the game purely as a laugh and it went down as one of the stupidest – yet weirdly enjoyable – Commodore 64 games of all time.

"The budget games were rattled off in a week," says Jon. "They were fun side projects and they were not worth putting too much time into. We just had an idea – like putting birds into *Galaxian* – and did it. It was not academic or deep or anything like that."

Such humour and a can-do attitude became a hallmark of Sensible Software, but their next release was a serious one – at least in terms of the attention it received. Again working with Ocean, the Sensible pair created *Wizball*. And it was a smash hit.

Released in 1987, the game was made for the C64 – with music by Martin Galway – and it was later ported to the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, Amiga, Atari ST and PC.

It was a unique, horizontally scrolling game in which you played Wiz, a character that had magically managed to place himself inside a ball with the aim of restoring colour to Wizworld; a land that had been left grey by the evil wizard Zark. The aim of the game was to collect droplets of paint to colour the levels; the paintdrops were then collected by your cat Nifta, travelling alongside you in a ball called the catalite. With lots of power-ups and aliens to shoot, it became a complex, involving game. Zzap!64 gave it 96% – and later went on to name it as the best game of the decade.

Jon says: "The concept of *Wizball* started with Chris, who created the control method and worked out the physics of the game. The colour thing was my idea and we had lots of discussions about how to make it two-player co-op. That is how we ended up with the cat idea. The idea was to create a game that would allow the player to adventure around the level a bit. We wanted the player to wander. If truth be told, though, our later game *Wizkid* contained the elements of adventure that we wanted to achieve with *Wizball*."

The success of both *Parallax* and *Wizball* had not gone unnoticed by Sensible. Jon and Chris used them to promote their next release, the Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit, with the box screaming: "By the programmers of *Wizball* and *Parallax*". The construction kit, which became known as SEUCK for short, was a dream for many wannabe programmers owning a C64 or Amiga. It allowed for the creation of simple shoot-'em-up games, giving the user a background editor, sprite designer, special effects composer, animation facilities and anything they needed to put a title together.

It spawned thousands of games – some poor, some ending up on shop shelves. But it is fair to say that the C64 version was able

DARLING, THEY WERE GREAT

When Codemasters snapped up *Sensible Soccer* in 1999, Richard and David Darling knew exactly what they were getting: a quality back catalogue. David Darling explains: "We'd always been really impressed with the quality of the Sensible games. They were such fun to play and the team had a lot of flair and creativity. The gameplay of their games was great. We knew Jon Hare and had a lot of respect for what he and the team achieved."

So what was David's favourite game? "For me it was *Sensible Soccer*," he says. "I still talk to people now and they are so enthusiastic about how *Sensible Soccer* was the best soccer game and had them hooked."

He added: "Jon Hare and the team were great personalities, very creative – like a rock 'n' roll band. They had fun making games and loved games and it showed through clearly.

"We're proud to have acquired such an amazing back catalogue. We've put them onto various formats, the Game Boy and mobile phones.

"I think they are such classics, they'll be around for a long time to come."



» Jon Hare and Chris Yates' first game together was *Twister: Mother Of Charlotte* for System 3.

» *Sensible World Of Soccer* is set to be launched on Xbox 360 Live Arcade.

to produce some decent games. It had collision checks between the player sprite and the background, something that was missing from the Amiga version (which was not programmed by Sensible). The Amiga version also had jerky sprites, poor scrolling, dodgy collision detection and a lack of artificial intelligence.

"It was just an idea we had and we ran with it," says Jon. "It started as a game but became a utility and we think it was pretty good. It certainly caught people's imagination."

Following SEUCK, the Sensible lads knocked out another budget game, again for Firebird's budget label. Called *Oh No!*, the game was a simple affair in which you played an ox breeder protecting your herd from alien rustlers in a decent, but not amazing, shooter.

It enabled Sensible Software to keep the money rolling in until they had their next idea. And it was one that 40-year-old Jon, a Norwich City fan, had wanted to create for years.

He says: "Chris and I were – still are – interested in football and both play it a bit. And we both liked a game called *Tehkan World Cup*. We drew all our inspiration for our next game from this."

That game was *Microprose Soccer* for the C64 and it closely resembled the 1985 arcade release, *Tehkan World Cup*: a top-down viewed game, which had a large trackball and single fire button. By swiping the trackball and hitting fire in *Tehkan*, you could control the direction and velocity of the ball. Sensible Software took the same top-down view and worked on the physics of football to produce a version for home computers, albeit making use of a simple joystick.

And it had everything any self-respecting C64 owner would hope for: speed, rain (allowing for great sliding tackles) and the concept of aftertouch, allowing you to swerve the ball after you had kicked it.

More importantly, it inspired many football games and became a landmark title. Here was a game that allowed you to replay every goal and see almost everything going on around you on the pitch.

"We thought the top-down view was the best way of approaching a soccer game," says Jon. "It makes it easier for the player to aim and if the goal is in front of you and you can see the frame, it gives you something to aim for.

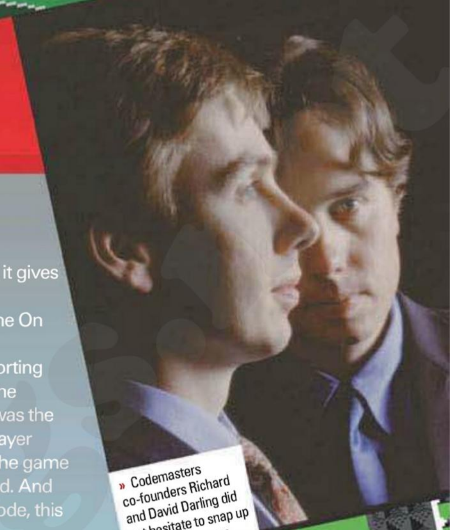
"I think we did it well. C+VG called it the 'Best Sports Game On Any Format Ever'."

Two years later and Sensible Software continued the sporting theme, releasing *International 3D Tennis* – "It was bizarre, the strangest game we've ever done," laughs Jon. The game was the first Sensible had produced for the 16-bits and it had the player controlling a wire-frame player. Despite the strange looks, the game played extremely well and the sprites were surprisingly fluid. And with ten different camera angles and a great two-player mode, this was yet another Sensible hit.

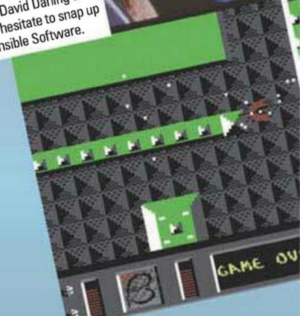
It was followed up by *Insects In Space* for the C64, which started a period of problems for Sensible Software. Jon and Chris created *Insects In Space* – a budget game in which you shot bugs trying to kidnap babies – over two months at the end of 1988.

Hewson made an offer for the game almost immediately and it was due to release it on its Rack-It label. But just as it was about to hit the shops, Hewson pulled the label and instead stuck the game on a compilation called *4th Dimension*.

Soon, Jon and Chris were to experience their first serious set of business problems with their next wave of games developed for the 16-bit machines.



» Codemasters co-founders Richard and David Darling did not hesitate to snap up Sensible Software.



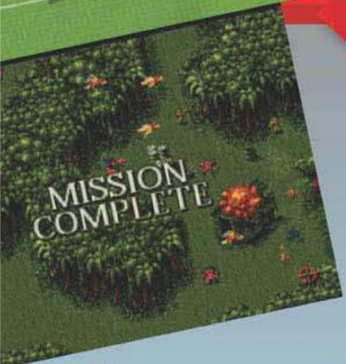
"WE THOUGHT THE TOP-DOWN VIEW WAS BEST. I THINK WE DID IT WELL. C+VG CALLED IT THE 'BEST SPORTS GAME ON ANY FORMAT EVER'"



» Jon Hare worked with Codemasters on a new soccer game, *Sensible Soccer 2006*.

» *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder* made it to mobile phones, courtesy of Jon Hare's new company, Tower Studios.

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



THE NO-SHOWS

There were a few cancelled *Sensible* games, the most notable examples being *Touchstone*, *Have A Nice Day* and the groundbreaking *Sex 'N' Drugs 'N' Rock 'N' Roll*.

This latter game hit major problems when GT Software, which had acquired the publishing rights after snapping up Warner Interactive Entertainment, found the game to be too risque. Sensible could not sell it to other publishers either so it languished in gaming hell. "We were trying to pre-empt 3D," says Jon Hare. "*Sex 'N' Drugs* had three hours of pre-rendered animation in it and it was expensive to make at the time, involving lots of man power and organisation. With hindsight, we needed two or three extra strong programmers." *Touchstone* was a big RPG project but Origin, which was going to publish the game, eventually decided to call a halt to it in November 1989, believing the market was turning to consoles. *Have A Nice Day* was earmarked for the PlayStation as an FPS. It had technical problems, primarily with the 3D and was canned.

The pair had signed a deal with Mirrorsoft, allowing it to publish *Mega Lo Mania, Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Soccer*. At the time Mirrorsoft was a major publisher, the software house arm of the Robert Maxwell empire, the man who used to own The Mirror newspaper (and who mysteriously died on 5 November, 1991 when he fell overboard from his luxury yacht, Lady Ghislane, leaving a huge pensions crisis in his wake). Mirrorsoft began to fall on hard times in the early Nineties and then it disappeared altogether, a lack of money and support getting the better of it.

Jon recalls: "Mirrorsoft went bust just after *Mega Lo Mania* was released. Our big mistake was that we'd also signed *Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Soccer* to the company as well.

"When the mess died down, we found we had lost 75 per cent of our turnover and the first quarter of our *Mega Lo Mania* royalties.

"People then tried to claim our intellectual property as their own. They wanted to keep *Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible Soccer* too.

"It made us wake up. From that point on, we ensured we controlled our IP and had it written into contracts that it was ours. Luckily, we managed to salvage *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder* from the wreckage. It was a hard time for the industry. There were lots of people in that room with the administrators trying to rescue their money – Probe and the Bitmap Brothers for example. Some were owed lots of money. We eventually sold *Cannon Fodder* on to Virgin and *Sensible Soccer* on to Renegade."

One game that was not affected was *Wizkid*, the sequel to *Wizball*. That was signed to Ocean. *Wizkid* picked up where *Wizball* left off. The player assumed the role of the disembodied head of *Wizkid*, flying around the screen, knocking various objects on top of enemies to kill them.

"*Wizkid* turned out the way we wanted *Wizball*," says Jon. "We often developed our ideas as we went along.

"There are some companies that do lots of market research that comes up with what you should and shouldn't do. Chris and I, though, well, we just didn't care what anyone else was doing. We were quite arrogant and we just thought it didn't matter about the competition, we'd do it better anyway. So that's how we developed our ideas and came up with games like *Wizkid* and *Wizball*.

"I've also found that people who worry about what others are doing don't do well themselves. We went ahead like we were in a band – we got an idea and just waited to see what happened."

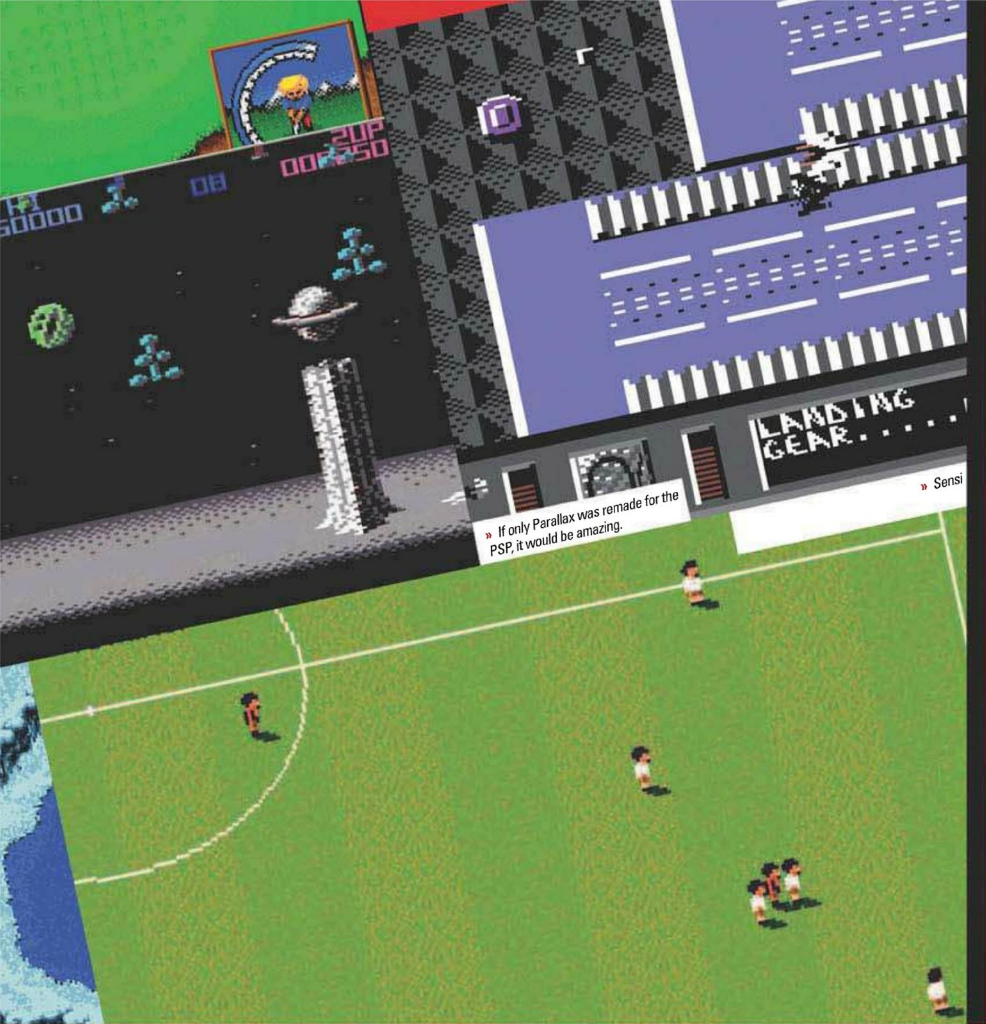
It was this approach that saw the development of their next football title. Four years after *Microprose Soccer*, Jon and Chris felt it was time to produce an updated version. And *Sensible Soccer* was born. The game – called *Sensi* for short – was a 2D affair that appeared on the Amiga and Atari ST in 1992, later being converted to the PC and Mega Drive and many other platforms. The top-down view, tiny sprites, made-up player names and fictitious football teams may have been off-putting to some, but it was addictive and had gamers pinballing the ball from player to player, setting up wonderful goals in fast, furious, end-to-end matches.

It spawned a sequel, *Sensible World Of Soccer*, in 1994 – by far the better game – adding decent management elements for an all-round package.

But even *Sensible Soccer* was meddled with. By the time *Sensible Soccer '98* arrived, heralding a move into the 3D era for the franchise, fans cried foul and the series faded away like a wounded old pro (only recently did we see a comeback, with *Sensible Soccer 2006* for the Xbox, PlayStation 2 and PC).

Sensible Soccer, in short, saw the best and worst times for Jon and Chris. "*Sensible Soccer* is our most successful game," says Jon. "In terms of kudos too it's our number one, followed, I think, by *Cannon Fodder* and *Wizball*.

"It drew inspiration from *Microprose Soccer*, which, as I've said was inspired by *Tehkan*. And, at the time it came out, we were enjoying our best years. It was a period when we released *Mega Lo Mania, Wizkid, Sensible Soccer, Cannon Fodder* and *Sensible*



» If only Parallax was remade for the PSP, it would be amazing.

» Sensi

SOFTOGRAPHY 1986-2000

1986
Twister: Mother Of Charlotte (Spectrum)
Parallax (C64)
Galaxibirds (C64)

1987
Wizball (Spectrum, C64)
Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit (C64, Amiga)

1988
Oh No! (C64)
Microprose Soccer (Spectrum, C64)

1990
International 3D Tennis (Spectrum, C64, Amiga, Atari ST)
Insects In Space (C64)
Mega Lo Mania (Atari ST, Amiga, Mega Drive, SNES, DOS)

1992
Wizkid (Atari ST, Amiga)
Sensible Soccer (Atari ST, Amiga, DOS, SNES)
Sensible Soccer International Edition (Atari ST, Amiga, Amiga CD32)
Sim Brick (Amiga)

1993
Sensible Soccer 92/93 (Atari ST, Amiga)
Cannon Fodder (Atari ST, Amiga, DOS, Archimedes)

1994
Cannon Fodder 2 (Amiga, DOS)
Sensible Golf (Amiga, DOS)
Sensible World Of Soccer (Amiga, DOS)

1995
Sensible World Of Soccer 95/96 (Amiga, DOS)
Sensible Train Spotting (Amiga)

1996
Sensible World Of Soccer European Championship Edition (Amiga, DOS)
Sensible World Of Soccer 96/97 (Amiga, DOS)

1998
Sensible World of Soccer 98 (DOS, Windows 9x)

1999
Sensible Soccer 98 European Club Edition (PlayStation, Windows 9x)

2000
Cannon Fodder (Game Boy Colour)

Golf all in quick succession. And in 1992 and 1993 we were named Developer Of The Year two years running.

"We were getting decent royalties and contracts – something we had begun to achieve pretty much from the moment we began to create for the Amiga. And it's fair to say that between 1991 and 1995 we just couldn't make mistakes. It was perfect – lots of cash, lots of creative control, good people, good times."

From the mid-Nineties, however, the industry was moving towards 3D. By this time, Sensible Software had six staff: Jon and Chris, lead programmers Chris Chapman (*Mega Lo Mania, Sensible Soccer* and *SWOS*), Julian Jameson (*Cannon Fodder I* and *II* and *Sensible Golf*), Dave Korn (who converted the 16-bit versions of *International 3D Tennis* and did some support programming on Sensible Soccer) and artist Stoo Cambridge (*Cannon Fodder I* and *II*, *Sensible Golf* and *SWOS*) and they had moved from the Cambridgeshire town of March to Saffron Walden, Essex but it was not enough to lead them into the new era.

"The move to 3D was innovative stuff, but we missed the boat by a couple of years and were too slow to react," says Jon.

"I think we were one of the last companies in Europe to move from 2D and when we did we were not very efficient with it. You can't do 3D with six people. We also began to hit other problems as we started to expand. We realised we couldn't deal with middle management or manage large teams. We were too used to doing it all. Chris and I even make tea and we were rubbish at delegating.

"In the end, we took on too much. People offered us really good money and we'd agree to do the jobs, but we ended up making things like *Sensi 98* which were not great."

Things began coming to a head and the Sensible Software lads realised something had to change. The world was becoming more commercial and making games suddenly became very expensive.

"Football was becoming more commercialised and licence-oriented," Jon exclaims. "It was more risky to take a game like *Sensible Soccer* and create teams that had similar names to the real thing.

"We were also finding that far from being able to maintain the 49 per cent average profit margins, which we had made during the 13-year period running from 1986 to 1999, we were now looking at having to expand our company to compete and to take more risks than we were used to for profit margins of as little as ten per cent to 20 per cent.

"When you're in a position that you own your own house and stuff, you do start to see things as a risk.

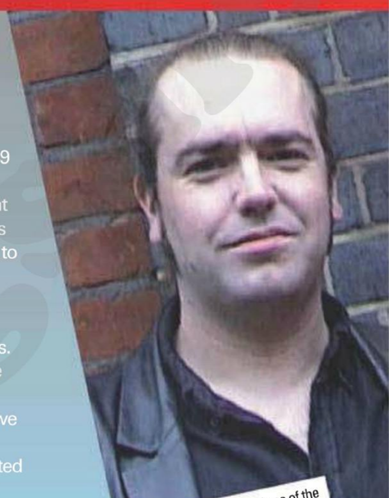
"So we sat down and made a decision. We sold to Codemasters. We played a simple game and cut our costs. We got out while we were still up.

"We selected Codemasters as our prime target. We liked what we saw with them and there was no one else we wanted to sell to."

That was in 1999. The Sensible era drew to a close having created no fewer than seven number one games in the UK over 13 years, scooping many industry awards in the process.

Jon went on to design many games for Codemasters, including various versions of *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*.

"I have no room to complain," he surmises. "We ran the company in the way we wanted and created some great games. I enjoyed all aspects of my time running Sensible. It was great to be able to be so creative and successful and it was just as much fun securing the contracts; we learnt the rules, we played the game and had a feel for what we were doing. I'm proud of what we achieved."



» Jon Hare, the creator of one of the greatest footy games ever made.

"WE RAN THE COMPANY IN THE WAY WE WANTED AND CREATED SOME GREAT GAMES"

THE CLASSIC GAME

GET DEXTER

Get Dexter – two words guaranteed to slap a smile onto the face of any CPC owner. Remi Herbulot's gentle fusion of sci-fi, platform puzzles and feng shui was a marvel when it was released over 20 years ago. Like all good science-fiction yarns and counterfeit Rolexes, it is truly timeless



IN THE KNOW



- **PUBLISHER:** ERE
- **DEVELOPER:** REMI HERBULOT
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+





» Don't turn your back on them Dexter, they can still kill you.

It's fair to say that thanks to Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond, the isometric platform genre pretty much ruled the Amstrad roost during its heyday. Who could forget a *Batman* game that had the caped crusader hopping around collecting Bat Mobile parts like a superhero special of *Scrapheap Challenge*? And many will fondly remember playing through the pair's most infamous creation *Head Over Heels*, with its intuitive tagging system, striking cartoon visuals and puppy-dog gameplay. But there exists another game, which might have slipped off your radar. Maybe because it wasn't written by the aforementioned isometric Einsteins, or perhaps due to its unassuming box art. But like all mild-mannered superheroes, this game would become legendary in CPC circles by two very different monikers: *Get Dexter* and *Crafton & Xunk*.

It was the official English release for the game that was entitled *Get Dexter*, but confusingly, your mission was to actually *prevent* Dexter from being 'got'. An android with a penchant for dangerous missions, Dexter learns that his kind is facing impending extinction and he's been enlisted to save his colony, XUL 3, from an escalating war that is approaching ominously on the horizon. To succeed in his quest, Dexter must infiltrate a well-defended base and access a super-computer using a numerical code – but before doing so he must first obtain



» They look friendly, but if that pair touch you, they'll drain your energy quicker than you can say, "where's my energy?"



» Scooter was unaware that Dexter, enraged with never getting any help, was going to stab him in the back with a wrench.



» This is one of the most frustrating puzzles in the game. In fact, Darran couldn't get past it and started weeping like a big baby.

"BEING WRITTEN IN THE AMSTRAD'S FABLED MODE 0 MEANT A COLOSSAL 16 COLOURS COULD BE USED ON SCREEN AT ONCE"



» When all of Dexter's energy gets zapped he turns into the Incredible Hulk, but sadly always dies of exhaustion before you can make use of his gamma powers.



» These elaborate-looking green pads will fire Dexter into the air, handy for reaching inaccessible doors, watering the plants, or simply taking a breather from being chased.

each part from eight professors who are dotted throughout the game.

Now, while its premise might sound a little complex, after a few seconds of playing this immediately engrossing game, you soon come to realise that *Get Dexter's* artificial tongue is securely coiled inside his chrome cheek. Dexter is (how can we put this) kind of how the Tin Man might have looked had he ditched the heart idea and begged the Wizard of Oz for a skin graft instead. Dressed like a crossing-guard balancing a funnel on his head, he waddles at quite a pace around his isometric sandbox, emitting just enough personality to make you concerned for his welfare as you guide him through the many wonderfully perplexing rooms that the game dishes up.

Behind many a great game character there often sits a willing, iconic, funny or annoying sidekick. Sonic had Tails, Mario had Luigi, the Master Chief has Cortana, and our man Dexter, well, not to imply barrel-scraping here, is paired up with a foot with a head on it. Known as Scooter, this sporadic sidekick jaunts around our hero like an excitable puppy, impervious to harm from the game's enemies. Looking past his odd exterior, Scooter does serve a vital purpose in the game; he can be brought to heel using a whistle, allowing Dexter to hop onto his head and access hard-to-reach areas, and while his bounding often proves irritating – especially when you're smothered in enemies – it's useful to single-out objects and areas of interest that will help Dexter in his adventure.

A puzzle aspect is fused into every facet of *Get Dexter*. It might look like a typical 'find the red keycard to open the corresponding red door' adventure but it's actually a lot deeper than that. Disposing of enemies isn't a case of finding precariously placed ammo, or spell casting with a quick slap of the blue Enter button. Scattered across every screen are objects, which can be picked up and used. These include wine bottles, canisters, magnets and futuristic gadgetry galore. Each enemy is only susceptible to attacks from certain objects, and as your stringent inventory briefcase will only carry one item at a time, progression requires a degree of trial and error, and a balance of disposal and advance. Accompanying the useful items is furniture, which can be manipulated, moved and stacked, giving Dexter access to high ledges and allowing him to reach further objects and progress in the game.

Colourful assortments of enemies litter the screens, ranging from small droids and punks with green mohicans to stressed-out, blonde lab-workers. Mimicking Death in *Gauntlet*, they will all home in on Dexter the second he sets a pixelated foot onto their screen and proceed to drain all his energy at a touch. The elusive number-crunching professors that Dexter must locate won't attack but will immediately ring the alarm the second they catch sight of our hero, causing a glut of robotic creatures and radiators to storm the room, poised to take him out like a Pokémon SWAT team. How you actually extract the vital ciphers from the doddering scientists proves a puzzle in itself. We're not about to leak how you do it, as that would be pilfering a huge chunk of enjoyment from those who have yet to experience it.

Graphically, *Get Dexter* pushed the CPC to unsurpassed domains. Being written in the Amstrad's fabled Mode 0 meant a colossal 16 colours could be used on screen at once. While today 16 colours wouldn't even cover a bullet casing in *Gears Of War*, for its time, performance-pushing on the CPC would often cause games to be sluggish, take months to load, and look like they should be labelled with a mental health warning. Thankfully, *Get Dexter* proved that it could be possible for 16 colours and one gameplay to share an Amstrad harmoniously.

Get Dexter feels as unsullied now as it did back when it was helping shake the scales of the 8-bit computer rivalry, and if you've yet to discover its multi-hued charms, we urge you to go and get Dexter no really, go get him.



» Jumping around is great for avoiding enemies and nothing to do with the fact that the jump and screenshot buttons are the same…



» *Get Dexter*: One of the finest-looking Amstrad games around.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

INTERCEPTEUR COBALT AKA MISSION DELTS
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8-BITS
YEAR: 1984

MACADAM BUMPER AKA PINBALL WIZARD
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8-BITS
YEAR: 1985

EDEN BLUES (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: VARIOUS 8-BITS
YEAR: 1987



Developed by ERE – one of the very first French software developers – *Get Dexter* was the first European game to ever receive the coveted Masterclass award in *Amstrad Action*, garnering an impressive 94 per cent from the magazine. ERE's first international hit, however, was the pinball sim, *Macadam Bumper*, also created by Remi Herbulot. It boasted a cool feature allowing pinball wizards to create their very own table – handy, as the game only had one measly slab to play on. Funnily enough, the game's loading screen features one of those annoying cucumber-heads from *Get Dexter*, although quite why he's bent over the table in that manner, engrossing himself with the cabinet's artwork is anyone's guess. Pay attention to your damn flippers, man.



» *Macadam Bumper* was another release from ERE in 1985.

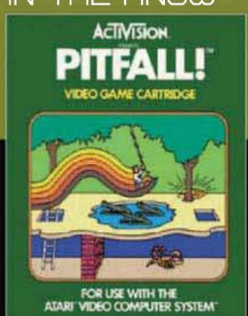
THE MAKING OF...

PITFALL!

When Mario was content dodging barrels thrown by a giant monkey and booting Koopas about, a true platforming hero was already making his mark, collecting treasures and avoiding countless nasties – and all on the humble Atari 2600. Join Craig Grannell as he talks to David Crane about the genesis of Pitfall!



IN THE KNOW



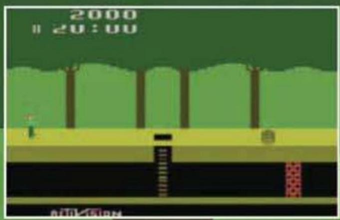
- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DEVELOPER:** DAVID CRANE
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM GAME
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

P*itfall!* For gamers of a certain age, the name alone is enough to bring about a warm, fuzzy feeling of gleeful nostalgia. Often cited as the earliest example of platform gaming, released as it was in 1982, programmer David Crane managed to eke out more than many thought possible from the humble Atari 2600. Technically amazing for the time, the game featured varied backgrounds, and had several animated, non-flickering sprites on each screen; the game's impressive visuals were matched by the all-engrossing gameplay, the player guiding Pitfall Harry though dozens of 'scenes', searching out treasure, using vines to swing across gaping pits, leaping on to the heads of crocodiles and nipping underground to take short cuts.

The genesis of the game was its main character – in the late Seventies, David was tiring of typical controllable elements in games, and wanted to create something more personable. "Back then, there were very few attempts at animated figures in games – you controlled tanks, jet planes, Pong paddles, and so on, because the limited number of display pixels severely restricted the creation of smooth animation," he explains. But in 1979, David had developed a realistic-looking human character – he just needed a game in which to house him. "Each time I was about to start another game, I brought out my little running man and cast about for a game that needed him," remembers David. "I tried a cops-and-robbers game, in which the man was running from the police, but I didn't like that concept, and so he went back on the shelf."

Eventually, in 1982, David was between games and decided he'd finally figure out a game for his diminutive animated man. He sat down with a blank sheet of paper and drew a stick figure in the centre. He then said: "Okay, I have a running man… Let's put him on a path," and drew two more lines on the paper. The path needed a location, and so David placed it in a jungle, surrounding it with trees. And then he had to figure out why his character was running in the first place. "I drew treasures to collect, enemies to avoid, and *Pitfall!* was born," he says, noting that the entire process of coming up with the concept took about ten minutes (although the subsequent programming clocked in at a rather more lengthy 1,000 hours).

As David developed his game, three clear influences crept in: "First, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* was playing in cinemas, and that started me thinking of an adventure in the jungle in the first place. Secondly, I really wanted Harry to swing on a vine, for which I have to give a nod to *Tarzan*.



» Harry, reflecting on the enormity of his task, took solace in being colour-co-ordinated with the surrounding jungle.



» As Harry jumped six feet into the air, it occurred to him that he should try out for his local athletics team.



» Harry thanked his lucky stars that the crocodiles were too lazy to eat anything that didn't stumble right into their open mouths.

"RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK WAS PLAYING IN CINEMAS, AND THAT STARTED ME THINKING OF AN ADVENTURE IN THE JUNGLE IN THE FIRST PLACE"
DAVID CRANE



» As Harry plummeted towards the crocodile's gaping jaws, he cursed David Crane for not giving him the ability to fly.

And finally, I remembered from deep in my childhood a pair of magpie cartoon characters called Heckle and Jeckle. They had a sequence during which they'd run across the heads of alligators, barely escaping the snapping jaws. I thought that would make for an interesting skill sequence in the game." But even with these elements starting to fall into place, David considered *Pitfall!* too linear: "The game began as a single-level trip through the jungle, but that made for a boring experience." The solution was the addition of an underground passageway, guarded by scorpions. This provided a crucial level of strategy to the game, because each screen that Harry traversed underground was the equivalent to three screens on the surface. "Using the underground paths, you could bypass empty or treacherous overhead screens, and without using them, you can't finish the game," says David.

Although simple by today's standards, cramming all of these ideas and characters into the Atari 2600 was a huge undertaking, and David admits that many ideas had to be tailored specifically for the console. "All objects in an Atari 2600 game are selected based on what can be drawn using the system's limited capability," he explains. "For example, early in my career at Atari, I designed a slot-machine simulator. When I tried to draw traditional slot-machine symbols – cherries, lemons, oranges, and so on – it became clear that there was no way to render them in eight monochrome pixels. Therefore, I used cacti, cars and other angular objects that were easily recognisable when drawn with pixels." A similar process was used with *Pitfall!*, with David colouring in squares on squared paper to figure out what the pixelated graphics would look like: "I experimented with objects until their identities were clear, and made the game work with the best-looking graphics." Oddly enough, Pitfall Harry sort of started life as David himself, before being reduced to a handful of pixels: "I'd worked on the little running man for a while, posing in mid-stride and sketching my own leg and arm positions, and so you could say that what you see is me running across the screen. Once you reduce something to a few pixels, however, any similarity to any person, living or dead, is lost!" Elsewhere, the swinging vine also proved to be a technical challenge. "It was made out of a single-pixel-wide Atari 2600 object whose position was moved left or right down the screen – you can see the same technique in two of my earlier games: *Fishing Derby* and *Laser Blast*," says David.

Even carefully crafting pixel-perfect graphics wasn't enough to get around the 2600's limitations, though, especially

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FREEWAY
SYSTEMS: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1981

GHOSTBUSTERS (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, ATARI 2600, ATARI 800/XL/XE, COMMODORE 64, MSX, NES, SEGA MASTER SYSTEM, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985-9

LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, APPLE II, COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM (128K)
YEAR: 1985-6



THE MAKING OF… PITFALL!



» Harry resisted bellowing a Tarzan-like cry as he swung across the lake – although he was very tempted.



» With glee, Harry noted the huge dollar sign on the bag, advising would-be kleptomaniacs that it wasn't full of snakes or old pants.



» As Harry fell down the pit, he gained crucial first-hand experience regarding the relevance of the game's name.

TEAM PLAYERS

Although many of Activision's games are credited as solo projects, David notes that much of the company's success came from the group synergy within the design lab: "While we each had our own game project working, we'd also kibbutz on each other's games. That way, each game had the flavour of its designer, but benefited from the vision and experience of the entire group."

Pitfall! was no exception. David explains that only a week before *Pitfall!*'s release, the game only offered the player a single life. "I was experimenting with that concept as sort of the ultimate challenge," David explains. "That's right – fall in one pit and start over from the beginning! Thankfully, my buddies practically tied me to my chair until I put in extra lives, and I'm glad they did!" David notes, though, that most help came in much smaller details: "These things were so small that taken individually you'd never notice. It was the sum total of all the feedback and suggestions that polished the games to a fine edge."



when taking into account the sheer size of *Pitfall!* "The world of *Pitfall!* is a circular path 254 screens in circumference. The game ROM contains only 4K of memory, and so there's not enough memory to hold both Harry's graphic frames and the definitions for 254 screens," explains David, noting that the largest ROM in 1982 was a mere 4,096 bytes, and that these days, 254 screens could take over half a million bytes. "But this is the kind of challenge that I have always enjoyed," says David. "I solved the problem on *Pitfall!* by creating an algorithm that defined every screen mathematically. The actual definition of the entire world took fewer than 50 bytes of ROM."

The way David went about accomplishing this was, he says, very technical. "At the core is a polynomial counter – a special binary counter that counts in a pseudo-random sequence. We used these polynomials to generate randomness in many of our games, but for the screen definitions I made a special counter that could create a sequence both forward and backwards," explains David. "If I called one algorithm, it would give me the next number in the sequence; with another, I could get the previous number." Therefore, if Pitfall Harry ran off of the right-hand edge of the screen, David called up the next number in the sequence; if he turned around and ran back off of the left-hand edge, he'd call up the previous number. With this number used to define each screen, a unique scene was defined that's the same each time the player visits it. "That was the tricky part," says David. "Now, if we select screen elements based on this number, we can define each individual screen. For example, we can define the background tree patterns based upon three bits of the 8-bit number, and the pit or pond type from three other bits. The treasures and hazards can be specified the same way. As long as every detail of the screen is based on that one number, the entire world can be computed algorithmically with very little memory. After that, you just have to find an interesting point in the sequence to start the game! As far as I know, this is the only time this technique has been used in this way."

With such attention to detail and careful programming, along with the fact that *Pitfall!* was a huge technical achievement, it perhaps comes as little surprise that David wouldn't want to turn the clock back and change anything. "I tweaked the heck out of that game, and I didn't let it go to market until I was satisfied. There is nothing I would have done differently," he claims. When pressed, though, he does admit that the limitations of the Atari 2600 meant that one thing couldn't make it into *Pitfall!*: "I wish I could have



» Harry stared longingly at the huge gold bar, wondering how he would fit it in his pocket.



» Harry made a mental note to discover who built the underground tunnel, to avoid using the same interior designer.



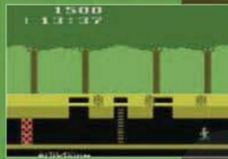
» The snake blew a raspberry at Harry, mocking his rope-swinging abilities.



» Majestically leaping over the giant scorpion, Harry regretted not bringing a can of extra-strength bug spray to the jungle.

DRIVING GAME

Although primarily tied to the small screen (along with a momentary leap to the arcades), *Pitfall!* has one unique placement in the real world, in the form of David Crane's car number plate. "In 1982, I had just gotten a new car and I was thinking about getting a personalised licence plate," he recalls. "It dawned on me that 'PITFALL' is a seven-letter word, and seven letters was the limit at the time for personalised plates in California." David said that he ran right out to the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) and grabbed the plate. "I still use it today, 25 years later," says David, clearly proud of what's turned out to be a smart investment. "And it still gets a few comments, although to be honest, the most common response is, 'That's a funny plate… What do you mean it's a videogame?'"



"PITFALL! SPAWNED AN ENTIRE GENRE OF GAMES: THERE WERE OVER 600 'PLATFORM' GAMES RELEASED TO THE MARKET FOLLOWING PITFALL!" DAVID CRANE

provided really cool victory sequences in my Atari 2600 games. A player who completed the game and collected every treasure should have been rewarded with an amazing animation, but there was never enough memory left over once the game was complete."

Clearly, such niceties didn't matter to the game-playing public at the time. *Pitfall!* was a resounding success for Activision, meeting with huge critical acclaim. Many gamers were amazed at what their humble Atari console was suddenly capable of, and the result was *Pitfall!* sitting atop the Billboard charts for a massive 64 consecutive weeks, shifting an estimated four million copies. "You can't have success like that and not know you had a hit on your hands," says David, in reaction to us asking whether he always knew *Pitfall!* was something special. "Even early on in development, it was clear that this was a milestone in videogames – the first 'platform' game. It opened complete new worlds of exploration-style games." So, how does it feel to be the one to kick-start a genre, and for others to exploit it so thoroughly over the coming years? "*Pitfall!* did spawn an entire genre of games: there were more than 600 'platform' games released to the market following *Pitfall!* – a clear example that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," mulls David. "But, honestly, that was nothing new in the early days of Activision – there wasn't a single game created in the first five years there that didn't contain an advancement for state-of-the-art videogames. Whether it was a new programming technique, a new graphic feature or just some new way to make the 2600 perform, every game we released spawned imitations." In fact, David even claims programmers from other companies have since admitted to him that they lifted complete sections of code from Activision games just to be able to compete on the same playing field! "But at the time, there were only a handful of people in the world who knew how difficult it was to make the unique displays in our games," concludes David. "It was like having one's entire working life become one giant puzzle. Fortunately, I like puzzles!"

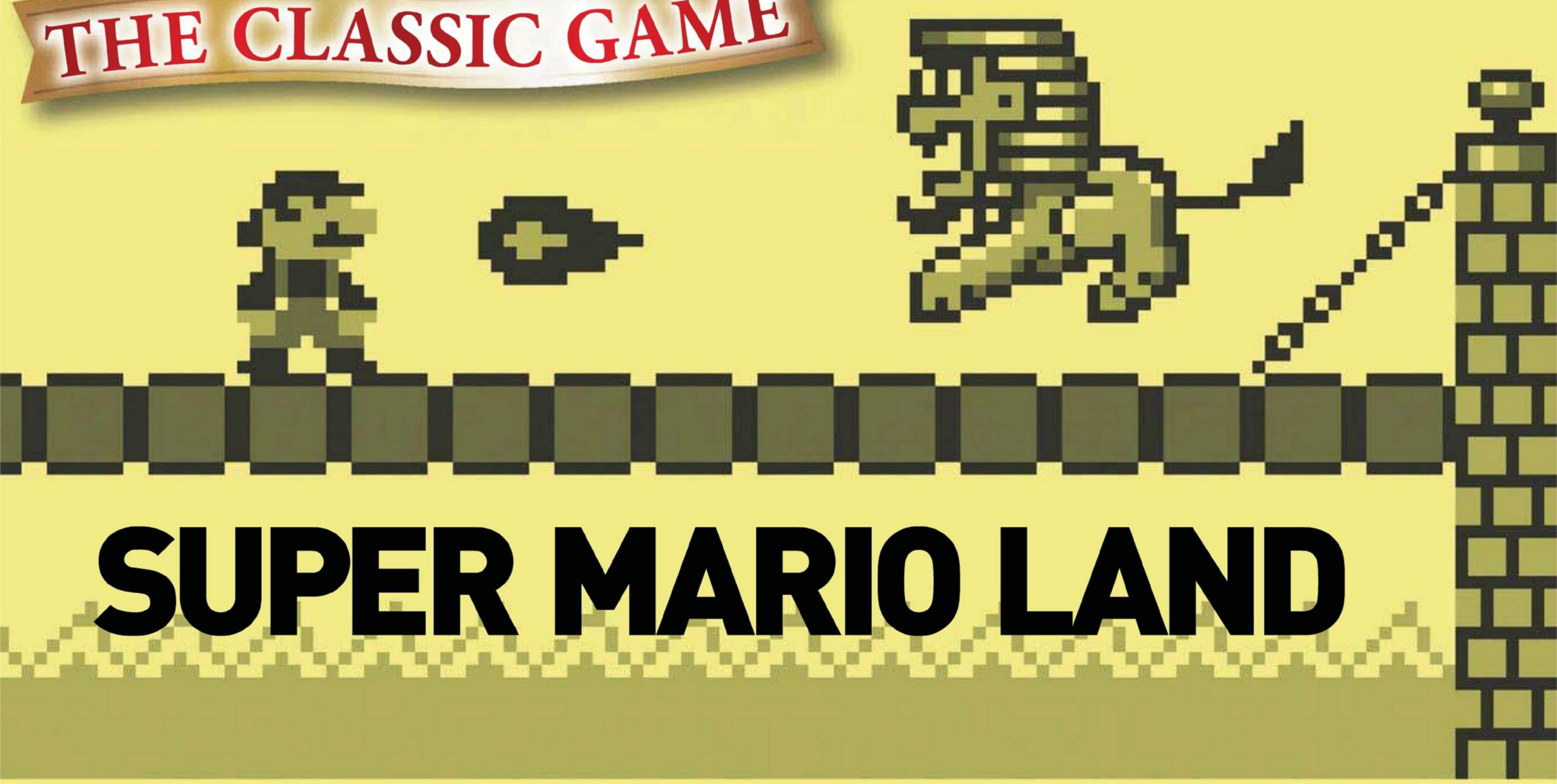
Luckily for avid fans of the game, David wasn't quite done with Pitfall Harry. While Harry joined the cast of the CBS *Saturday Supercade* cartoon, David was hard at work on the sequel, which would borrow elements from the show, including its theme song and characters. Indeed, our intrepid programming hero, David Crane, broke yet further new ground when working on *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*. But that's a whole different story for another time… who needs *Jackanory* when you've got *Retro Gamer*?



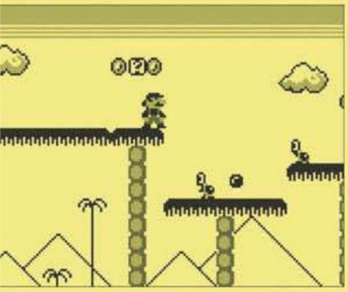
» As Harry admired the giant ring, he decided he didn't want to meet the girl on whose finger it would snugly fit.



» With two seconds left on the clock, Harry's realised his chance of collecting all the treasure was lower than the underground scorpion breaking out into song.



SUPER MARIO LAND



» Look at the use of space. The clean lines. The almost mathematical precision of placement. Extraordinary.

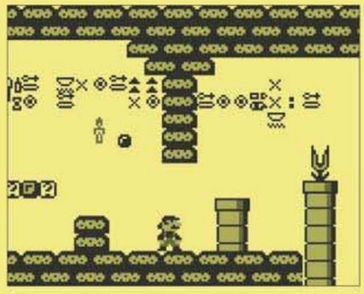
One of the monochrome Game Boy's earliest releases, Super Mario Land displayed a clever understanding of the hardware's inherent abilities. It contained bold and ingenious design decisions, which were promptly ignored by nearly all future GB developers. Despite being a Classic Game, why didn't more follow its example?

The Game Boy is a curious system. Nearly everyone owned one, but when you look, and we mean really look at the release list, there are strangely few titles that scream out as being all-time classics. Far too many poor licences, a lot of generic rubbish and countless games, which, despite being mind-numbingly astounding, few have even heard of, let alone actually had the fortune of playing – have you ever heard of *Cat Trap* or *Mr. Chin's Gourmet Paradise*? Several games haven't even been dumped.

This leaves only a select few titles worthy of two-page Classic Game coverage: *Tetris*, *Gargoyle's Quest*, *Pokémon*, *Link's Awakening*, *Alien 3* and, of course, *Super Mario Land*. Notice how most were either released early in the system's life or, in the case of *Pokémon*, began development very early on before getting a late release. Why were so many of the greatest GB games, like *Super Mario Land* (a launch title), mainly forged in those early experimental years? The general reason is one of scope, with later releases being overly ambitious, trying to replicate NES and later even SNES-style visuals, nearly always resulting in a turgid mess (how much crack had RARE been smoking when releasing guff like GB *Killer Instinct*?).

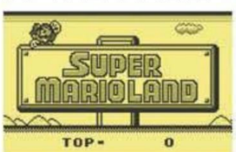
Super Mario Land's magnificence as a GB game results from its minimalist purity. Look at everything's diminutive pixel stature, stripped back to the bare essentials yet still recognisable. The minute details are exquisite in the extreme, evoking the same feelings as seeing delicate Japanese embroidery, nouveau cuisine or a puppy whose body is too small to support a deformedly large head. By not attempting to shoehorn enormous sprites onto the system's limited 160 x 144px screen, it meant all potential dangers could be seen in advance and there was no need to jump blindly hoping for a platform to appear; there was no blurring or confusion when viewing the screen, which is arguably the most important thing in handheld games.

Visually everything is functional, with an abstract symbolism for key elements. There is the standard Power Mushroom that increases size, but due to the limited



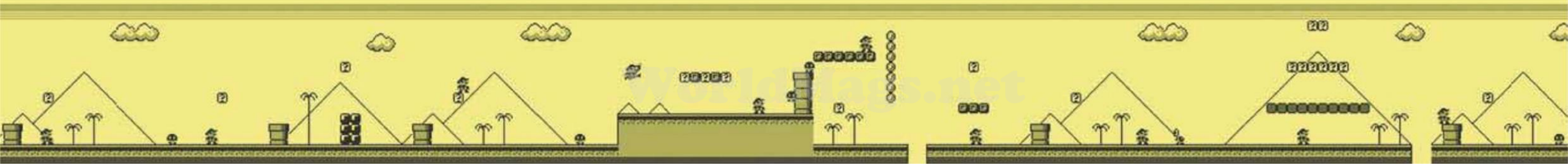
» The Egyptian-themed levels even have hieroglyphs in the background. How's that for realism?

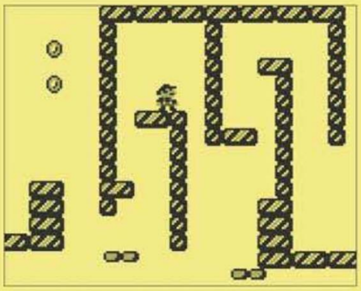
IN THE KNOW



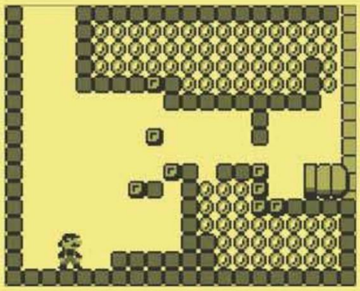
- » **VERSION FEATURED:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £4

"THE MINUTE DETAILS ARE EXQUISITE IN THE EXTREME, EVOKING THE SAME FEELINGS AS SEEING DELICATE JAPANESE EMBROIDERY OR NOUVEAU CUISINE"





» A beautiful example of the simple but effective design in *Super Mario Land*. Look at the structure and usage of platforms.



» Shoot a fireball through the holes and watch as it collects all the coins for you.



» Look closely at Mario. Closer! He's replicating Phil Collins' body moves in the music video to *I Can't Dance*.

palette the 1Up mushroom is replaced with a heart – a different but equally recognisable icon. It may seem strange to say, but there is no wastage in *SML* – no grotesque excess and no superficiality to distract from the perfectly formed core. In this way *SML* acutely represents many of the things people like about and seek in retro games: abstract minimalism that isn't contrived, highly refined mechanics and a purity of design that gives the impression that every block and every coin's position has been agonised over.

This high quality is not surprising when you consider the all-star development team. Along with Hirokazu "Hip" Tanaka on sound, the man behind *Metroid*'s music and highly experienced in working with limited audio architecture, there were other people of significance. The producer and man who oversaw the project was not Shigeru Miyamoto but Gunpei Yokoi – the mentor of Miyamoto and also the man who designed the Game Boy. If anyone was suited to making use of what the Game Boy offered, it was Yokoi. He understood the GB's limitations and so expertly worked within them. Others who had a hand in design were Satoru Okada (worked on *Metroid* and is head of the division behind most of Nintendo's handheld systems) and Hirofumi Matsuoka (*Metroid* and *WarioWare*). These were undoubtedly some of Nintendo's best, and it's unsurprising that they created a launch title for the new hardware.

> "SUPER MARIO LAND'S MAGNIFICENCE RESULTS FROM ITS MINIMALIST PURITY; EVERYTHING'S STRIPPED BACK TO THE BARE ESSENTIALS, YET IS STILL RECOGNISABLE"

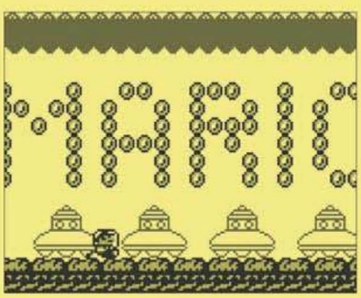


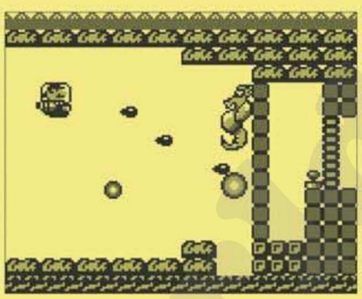
» Hit the block and then watch as the mushroom sails through the air. Eating one increases your size.

There are some great moments throughout, like the urgency after killing turtles since their shells explode. Fireballs bounce diagonally off every surface and also collect coins. Because they continue bouncing, it allows strategic destruction of enemies from far off, via rebound hits, and also the ability to get distant coins. This coin ability dramatically changes the entire game dynamic; it was a revolution of the traditional *Mario* ethic, though curiously it was never adopted by any of the later iterations. The magnitude of this addition cannot be overemphasised, refreshing the traditional formula and proving to be incredibly fun.

All of this highlights how exaggerated the importance and skill of Miyamoto is, to the point where he overshadows so many of Nintendo's other equally capable visionaries. The combined efforts of Okada and Matsuoka on *SML* were exceptional, being great fun and wonderfully refreshing. It's shameful then that the sequel, *6 Golden Coins*, saw the original development team replaced and also abandoned so many of the original's cool ideas, in a hopeless and almost nauseating attempt to pander to the fans of, and copy ad hoc, Miyamoto's NES versions. *SML* in retrospect is a bizarre and isolated off-shoot of the main series, which could have easily starred a new protagonist, and has sadly been almost forgotten over the years.

We're not suggesting that *Super Mario Land* is the best *Mario* game ever (technically, it's not even a true *Mario* game), or even that it's more than simply very good. We're suggesting that it symbolises an important way of thinking about game design, focusing on making the best use of the resources available. These are things forgotten by today's developers and, as handhelds move closer to consoles in terms of power (eerily reminiscent of consoles encroaching on arcades in the past), we can't help but feel pangs of nostalgia for the days when handheld games didn't simply mimic portable console games. These were days when handheld games were unique, specially created for their format; the days when *Super Mario Land* was appreciated without developers asking "what if we made it bigger?"





» This is Marine Pop, Mario's own custom submarine. *Super Mario Land* is the only game in the series to feature controllable submarines and aeroplanes.

TAINTED LOVE?

Are the Mario brothers overweight, moustached, latter-day Lotharios? Surely this is the question parents would ask if only they'd take a closer look at the products peddled by Nintendo. In *Super Mario Land* there is the introduction of a second love interest for Mario, namely Princess Daisy of Sarasaland (the other being Princess Toadstool and Peach who are both one and the same princess, though are perhaps two deranged polar-opposite personalities contained within one alternating being of domineering wickedness and submissive obedience – depending on which demented fan fiction you read). Contorting the issue of Mario's sordid liaisons is that Daisy is rumoured to be involved with Luigi (who also seems infatuated with Mario's Peach). We're not sure if she hooked up with Luigi after her rendezvous with Mario, or if she already knew Luigi and Mario was having an affair with her behind his brother's back. Or perhaps they were all involved, like some kind of depraved swingers club, hooped-up on magic mushrooms in the Mushroom Kingdom.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

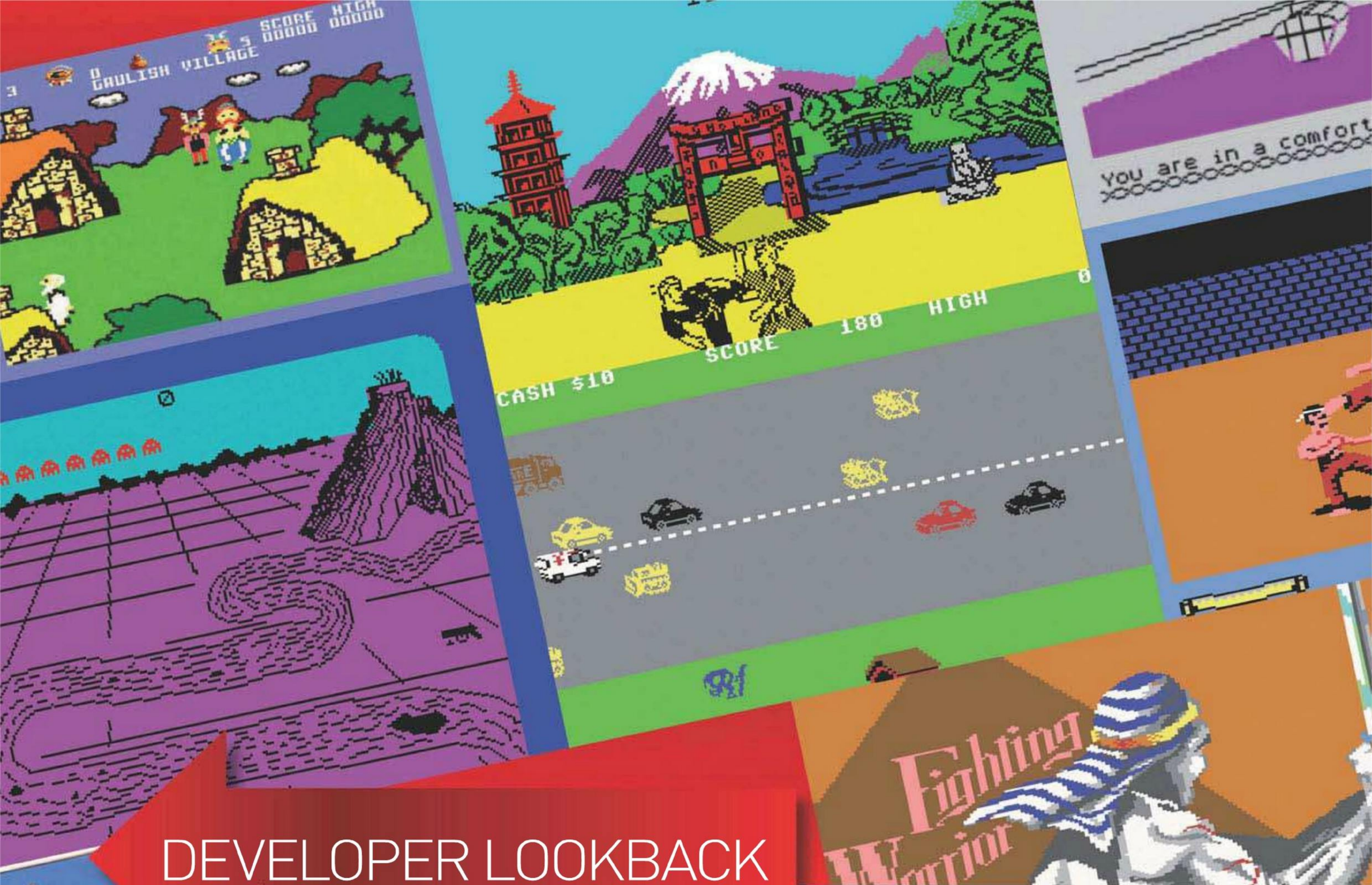
RADAR SCOPE
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1980

SUPER MARIO LAND 2
SYSTEMS: GAME BOY
YEAR: 1992

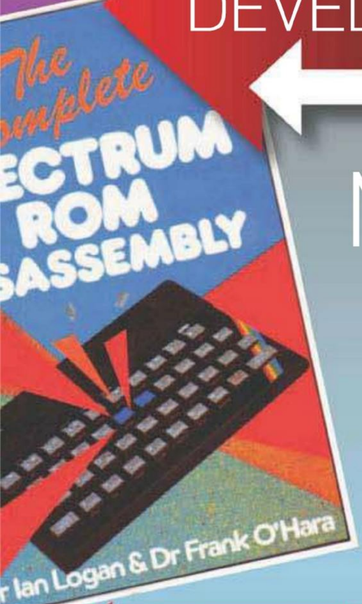
MARIO AND WARIO (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1993







DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



MELBOURNE HOUSE (PART 1)

HE MAY HAVE ONLY EVER PLAYED CHESS ON HIS COMPUTER, BUT ALFRED MILGROM, FOUNDER OF MELBOURNE HOUSE, KNEW GAMES WERE SET TO BE HUGE. AND IN CREATING INFLUENTIAL AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPER BEAM SOFTWARE, HE ENSURED HE WAS AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE INDUSTRY, AS DAVID CROOKES DISCOVERS IN THE FIRST OF A SPECIAL TWO-PART SERIES…

IN BRIEF

Alfred Milgrom sets up a publishing company with four friends in Australia in 1972. Six years later he moves to London to form a new publisher, Melbourne House. Increasingly homesick, he returns to Melbourne and sets up Beam Software, inspired by Clive Sinclair's ZX80. With a string of adventure games including *The Hobbit*, Beam becomes hugely successful. And then *Way Of The Exploding Fist* arrives, propelling the firm to the top. Yet its golden period during the Eighties is threatened when Melbourne House experiences financial difficulties.

IT'S EARLY DECEMBER in 1980 and William Tang is alone in someone else's living room. He taps on a computer keyboard for a moment or so, gets caught up in what he is doing and sets about his business of writing some software. Watching over him are Alfred Milgrom and Naomi Besen. They have put their efforts into a new Australian company, Beam Software, and if that means giving up their lounge until Tang goes back to university in February, then so be it. Hey, it's cheap after all and it's not as if they have an alternative office to work from.

Ten months have passed since a homesick Milgrom was sitting in London, reading a copy of the *Australian Financial Review*, engrossed in an article about the start of game publishing in the US. The article had discussed titles such as chess and adventure games by Adventure International, and as he pored over every single word, Milgrom began to get excited. It was, he believed, time to act.

By this point, Milgrom and his then wife, Naomi, had been in Britain for two years, having moved to London to set up book publisher Melbourne House. Milgrom already had a strong publishing background: in 1972, upon completing a science degree at the University of Melbourne, he formed Outback Press with four friends in Australia. But during his time with Outback he realised the firm was being held back because many American publishers were reluctant to sell Australian rights to their titles. UK book publishing companies were simply unwilling to buy US licences that didn't include Australian rights and so were already sewing up the Australian market. Milgrom figured that by forming a publishing company with Naomi in the UK, he would be in a better position to



snap up both the UK and Australian rights to American books. But now he was realising he could branch out in a fresh direction and produce books with his own content. And the fledgling computer industry would be the perfect niche, particularly since Clive Sinclair was releasing the ZX80. The possibilities of entering this new market were just too vast to ignore.

Milgrom set to work. He says: "I had an idea to create a book called *30 Programs For The ZX80*. You see, at the very beginning the idea was not to develop software, but rather to develop content for computer books. You have to remember that our business and expertise was book publishing so our initial idea was to develop content that would satisfy the needs of computer users."

The book was published in September 1980 and to market it, Naomi contacted Clive Sinclair to obtain an endorsement. But Sinclair was too busy to take the call. "I don't think he had even had time to look at the book," says Milgrom. "But after many repeated calls from Naomi, he told his secretary to say that the book was excellent. "We then took this, and ran ads for the book in the computer magazines quoting: 'This book is excellent. – Clive Sinclair.' It sold pretty well."

Within a couple of months, Milgrom and Besen decided to move back to Australia. Taking the first two initials from his wife's surname and combining it with his own initials, Alfred Milgrom formed Beam Software with the intention of continuing to produce computer publications, which would be published by Melbourne House in London.

To help create new software for the books, they decided to hire staff and soon brought in the first person to be employed by Beam. Milgrom recalls: "When Naomi and I returned to Australia, we did not yet have an office or any employees so I very quickly started searching for someone to help develop content. That's when William Tang came to work for us. He started in December and stayed until the end of his vacation in February. But he continued to work with us during his studies and for many years afterwards."

Milgrom then had a brainwave. "I began to think more about the concept of publishing," he says. "I realised that there was very little difference between developing material and putting that content onto paper or putting that content on a cassette tape." Beam became a computer game developer, its games would go on to be published by sister company Melbourne House. They became the two most important game companies ever to kangaroo-hop from Australia to the world stage.

Not only were they in the right place at the right time – "the Sinclair ZX80 was launched with no software or books for people who bought it", says Milgrom – they also became synonymous with quality games. And Milgrom had the pick of Australian computer talent. Tang's arrival at Beam allowed the firm to start work on getting the best out of the ZX80 and Milgrom wanted to develop a game written entirely in machine code. Since the ZX80 only allowed BASIC programs to be loaded, Tang had to enter the code as hex in a REM statement. Without delving too deep into the technical side, the result of this work was the development of a version of *Space Invaders* for the ZX80, which was ready by March 1981. Misfortune struck, however. Milgrom says: "I arranged to

WORKING FOR BEAM

Programmer Ian Malcolm says his first day at Beam was a mixture of excitement, nervousness and a dream-like feeling. But what was it like working there? "Alfred Milgrom was very hands-on and tended to run things from the top down, taking care of the business side. He'd go to trade shows and make deals but also did things like interviewing and hiring staff. He was effectively producer on numerous projects – a mixed blessing. Seemingly arbitrary design changes would come from nowhere, and he had a habit of turning up at programmers' desks unexpectedly and expecting to be shown something impressive. But he was willing to give people a shot at different things if they believed they could do it. As for Naomi, in the 13 or so years I worked there, on and off, I probably saw her once a year or less. Her involvement in a hands-on or development sense was effectively zero."

"SYNONYMOUS WITH QUALITY, BEAM SOFTWARE AND MELBOURNE HOUSE BECAME THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT GAME COMPANIES TO EMERGE FROM AUSTRALIA"



» *Bazooka Bill* was a run-of-the-mill platformer, but it was made by Arcade, another Melbourne House division dedicated to producing shoot-'em-ups.

» Melbourne House picks up the top licence that is *Asterix*.

ADAM LANCMAN

In 1982, Adam Lancman joined Melbourne House/Beam as an in-house accountant. He had no previous knowledge or experience with computer games and his background was as an auditor with one of the big accounting firms. But he very quickly became interested in the computer game business and became an invaluable part of the Melbourne House/Beam team. As time went on, he became a shareholder and director in the business and eventually became the managing director of Beam Software. Alfred Milgrom says: "What Adam provided was much-needed extra depth to the management team. I think that, in retrospect, even with Adam Lancman on board it would be fair to say that we didn't have enough management expertise in the company. But Adam became the face of Beam Software to the industry, constantly going to meet with other people in the business. He would regularly spend three months of each year travelling away from Australia and his family. He was very passionate about the Australian computer games industry and was appointed president of the Game Developers' Association of Australia, where he worked tirelessly for all Australian development studios. It is a loss to the entire Australian games industry that Adam Lancman passed away last year."

fly to London to launch the game and promote the other titles we were developing. But the week that I arrived back in London was the week that Clive Sinclair announced the ZX81 machine. All of a sudden, no one was interested in our new product any more, even though the ZX80 was still in shops and still selling. This was a very important lesson for us. It made us realise that there was no set life for any particular machine, so the emphasis had to be on trying to develop products for each machine as quickly as possible. Also we learned that as soon as a new machine was announced, the sales of products for the old machine dropped dramatically."

In 1981, however, Milgrom obtained the licensing rights to *The Hobbit*. The firm had promised to release the book in conjunction with the game and it began developing what would become a new style of adventure game. Based on the novel by JRR Tolkien, *The Hobbit* computer game took around 18 months to write. It had around 50 locations and was released in 1982 on the Spectrum (later being ported to machines such as the CPC464, BBC Micro, Commodore 64, Oric and Dragon 32). It came with a copy of the book and had an advanced parser, which moved away from the simple verb-noun inputs of many other games.

In fact, *The Hobbit* made great use of 'Inglish', a successful attempt by programmer Stuart Ritchie to create an advanced parser. While rivals were content with parsers that allowed basic inputs such as 'get sword', *The Hobbit* catered for complex phrases, which could understand two or more commands and then act on them. Adverbs, pronouns and punctuation were also permitted and objects were categorised according to size and weight. Objects could be combined or damaged and the action took place in real-time. If you left the machine while you nipped to the loo, you may have seen the message 'You wait – time passes' on the screen upon your return.

The Hobbit became the biggest selling Spectrum adventure of all time, a proud moment for the game's author, Philip Mitchell. He went on to create other adventures for Melbourne House, including *Sherlock Holmes*, a game that was delayed around four months since Mitchell had high standards and insisted that it was completed to his satisfaction before release.

At the same time, Melbourne House was continuing to publish computer books, producing titles like *Spectrum Hardware Manual* and *Spectrum Microdrive Book*. But as the popularity of the computer games soared, so the books began to take a back seat. "Book development is notoriously slow, with long lead times between the time the manuscript is finished and when the book is released," explains Milgrom. "This made it very difficult to develop interesting computer books when the lifetime of the computer models themselves was not easily predicted. In the early days of software publishing, games were also more profitable than books. So as computers became more popular and games started outselling books, there was little incentive to keep the book business going."

Certainly, the games side was taking off. The arcade classic *Penetrator* became one of 1983's best selling Spectrum games and utilities such as Melbourne Draw proved a hit, showing a willingness for Milgrom's firm to branch into new areas. This was shown just as starkly with the 1984 release of the *High-Level User-Friendly Real-Time Games Designer*, or *HURG* for short. Things were looking good, and by this time the 12-strong team at Melbourne House UK had moved into the spacious ground floor of a new office block in Richmond, its gold-tinted windows giving the building a cutting-edge feel.

"Back then, the company was very laid back, though," says programmer Andrew Davie, who worked for Beam. "It was typical for people to be at the office around the clock, but programmers were generally late in – after 10am always, after 2pm often – but late to leave. Overnight sessions were not unheard of, and it was quite common to work until 10pm or 11pm."

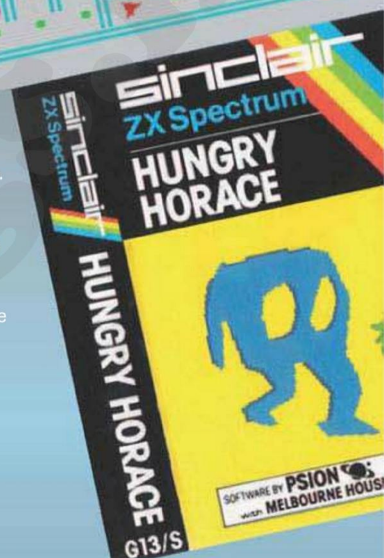


» Take that! Another number one smash, *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* is one of the first 8-bit beat-'em-ups.

» *Doc The Destroyer* was a beautifully illustrated text adventure.



» *Hungry Horace*, programmed by William Tang and with graphics by Alfred Milgrom, was a great *Pac-Man* clone and one of the few Spectrum games available in ROM format.



This hard work was being well received. Reviews of Melbourne House's games were largely glowing, but the best was yet to come. While *The Hobbit* had given Melbourne House a firm footing in the market, it was karate simulation *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* in 1985 that would really capture people's imagination. Created for machines such as the Spectrum, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC, this was one game that just could not fail.

"The credit for *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* has to be given to Gregg Barnett," says Milgrom. "Gregg was our resident C64 expert – his initial work at Beam was the conversion of some of our successful Spectrum games to the C64, where they were not so successful. But Gregg came up with the idea of doing a karate game, and he had some definite ideas about how sports games should play. In my opinion, the two main reasons why *Exploding Fist* was so successful was because of the graphics and because of the way that Gregg programmed the user interaction. Instead of just mapping each joystick movement to a specific move, the move changed depending on which action you had just completed. This meant that there was immense fluidity to the game, and no matter which move the player chose, it looked good. Gregg worked very closely with the graphic artist Greg Holland as well to ensure that fluidity of movement. The other element of the user interaction was the artificial intelligence, and I think that the AI gave the player just the right blend of challenge and ability to win, although we underestimated the power of low kick."

The game, regarded as the first one-on-one home beat-'em-up, sold more than 500,000 copies on the Commodore 64 alone and was number one in the European game charts. Gregg Barnett says: "I can still remember the day I did my first big compile and got what was effectively the two-player game working. Without telling anybody, I went to make a coffee, and when I came back there was a queue of people playing the game. That's when we all knew we had a potential hit."

Developer Beam and publisher Melbourne House were on a roll. In 1986, Beam had secured ten per cent of the UK market. Games such as *Rock 'N' Wrestle*, the first home computer wrestling game, and the comic book-styling of *Mugsy's Revenge* were critically acclaimed. *Mugsy's Revenge*, which pitted players as a gangster in 1919 making cash by illegally supplying alcohol during the Prohibition era in America, was programmer Davie's first game. "I was working on the C64 version and I was a bit out of my depth, as it had been a few months since I'd done assembler," he reveals. Alfred had ideas about what he wanted from the game and my job was basically to implement these as best I could given my skills at that stage. What made Melbourne House great, I think, was our ability to coax the machines to do things that other companies were unable to."

Games writer Paul Kidd also worked on *Mugsy's Revenge*. He recalls: "I was on the dole, masterfully equipped with a degree in Aztec religion and English Civil War history, when my fiancée found an advert looking for writers. "I got a freelance job, initially for *Mugsy's Revenge* then later *Doc The Destroyer*. At the time, the company had been working on *The Hobbit*, and suddenly found that it needed people capable of writing conversations, location descriptions and stuff like that. So I was just what the doctor

"THE HOBBIT GAVE MELBOURNE HOUSE A FIRM FOOTING, BUT WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST REALLY CAPTURED PEOPLE'S IMAGINATION"

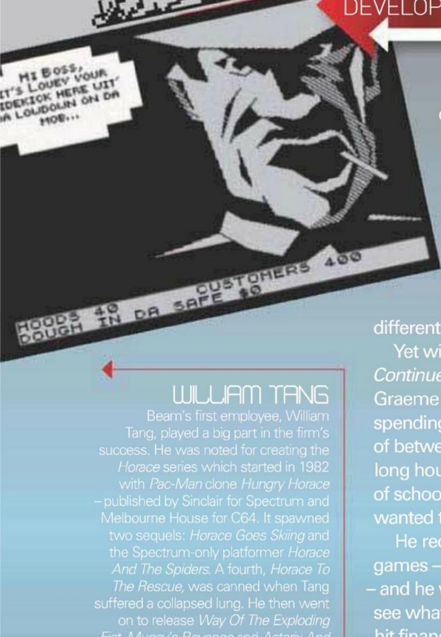


» Selling over a million games, *The Hobbit* – with its Inglish parser – was a revolution and also Australia's first major gaming export.

» The 3D wrestling game *Rock 'N' Wrestle* came at a time when the sport was popular on television with the likes of Big Daddy.

» A second sequel to *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*, keeping the spirit of the game alive.

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



ordered." With the success of *The Hobbit* ringing in Beam's ears, Kidd was hired as a writer. "My first full-time job was doing location descriptions and dialogue for the *Fellowship Of The Ring* game. It has always been a favourite of mine because of the idiotic gameplay. You see, programmers put the games together, and programmers assumed that players were going to be logical. So after the game was released, I asked if I could actually play the game – and broke it in about 15 different ways in a single afternoon."

Yet with other major releases such as *Fist II: The Legend Continues*, it seemed things just could not go wrong. Programmer Graeme Scott says: "At the time, the firm was quite prolific, spending just six to eight months on projects, working in teams of between two and five people. I remember there were a lot of long hours and really tight deadlines but as it was my first job out of school I didn't know any better. I was doing something I always wanted to do so it didn't really matter."

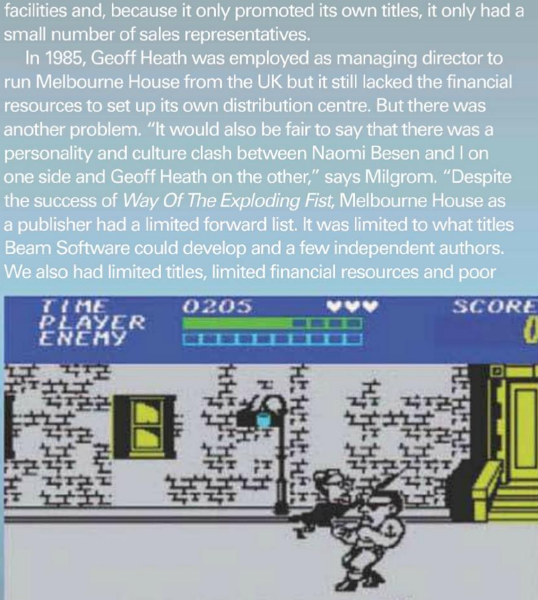
He recalls how Milgrom would come up with a host of ideas for games – "not all of them were of any practical use," Scott laughs – and he would walk around the programmers every morning to see what the staff were doing. But then, in 1987, the company hit financial problems. Melbourne House sold its UK publishing arm and the name to Mastertronic, a publisher and distributor of budget games. Kidd says: "Naive as I was in those days, I thought it absurd that anyone would buy a name. For us at Beam it was just 'business as usual'."

The problem had set in around 1985 and 1986 when Melbourne House and Beam were trying to decide whether they should concentrate on game development or game publishing and distribution. Management resources were being stretched very thinly and the firms did not have the skills to run companies in both the UK and in Australia since they had different requirements and different approaches to the products. Melbourne House also faced major hurdles in trying to compete against distributors such as US Gold, which concentrated on the publishing and distribution functions. Melbourne House did not have its own distribution facilities and, because it only promoted its own titles, it only had a small number of sales representatives.

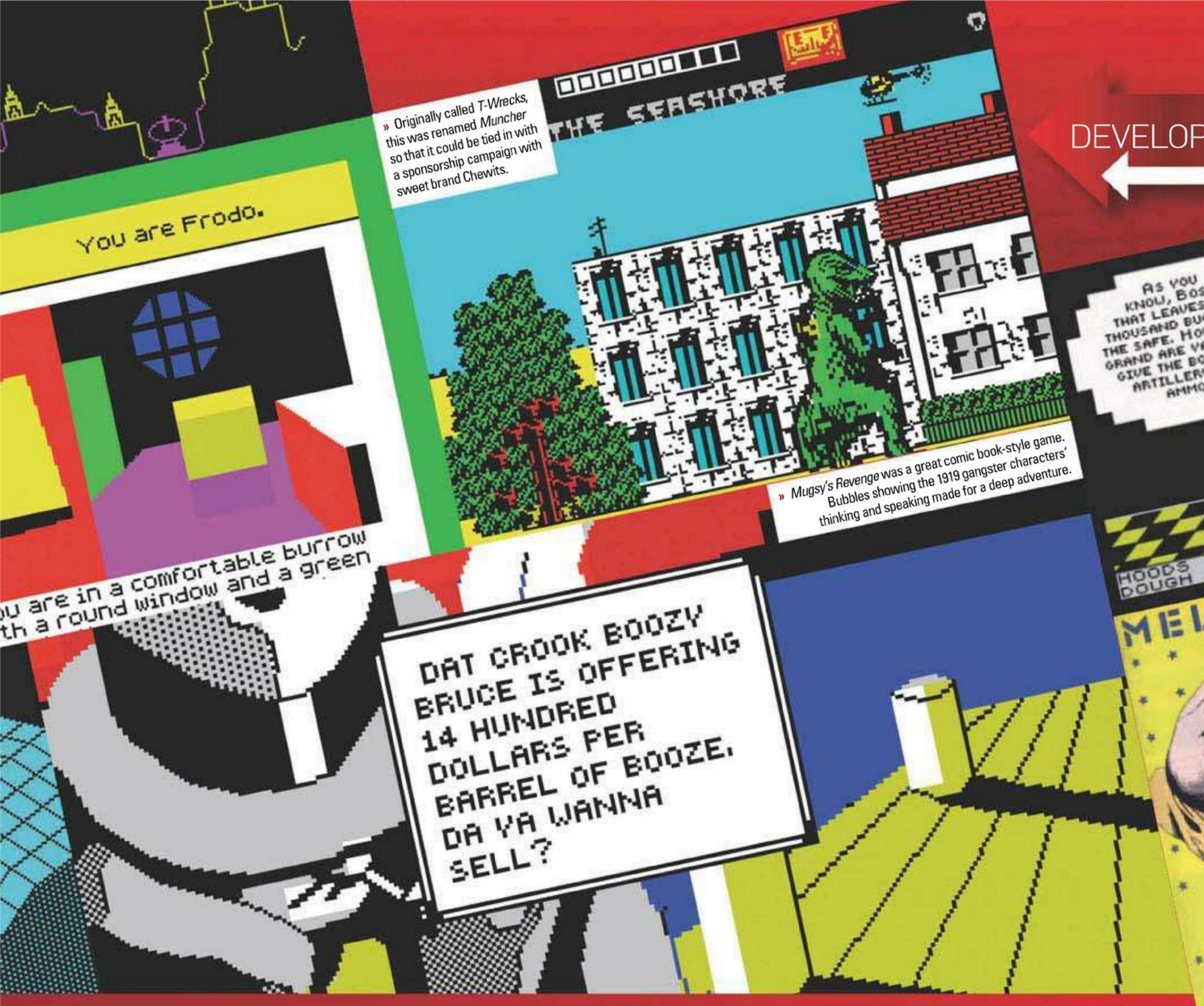
In 1985, Geoff Heath was employed as managing director to run Melbourne House from the UK but it still lacked the financial resources to set up its own distribution centre. But there was another problem. "It would also be fair to say that there was a personality and culture clash between Naomi Besen and I on one side and Geoff Heath on the other," says Milgrom. "Despite the success of *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, Melbourne House as a publisher had a limited forward list. It was limited to what titles Beam Software could develop and a few independent authors. We also had limited titles, limited financial resources and poor

WILLIAM TANG

Beam's first employee, William Tang, played a big part in the firm's success. He was noted for creating the *Horace* series which started in 1982 with *Pac-Man* clone *Hungry Horace* – published by Sinclair for Spectrum and Melbourne House for C64. It spawned two sequels: *Horace Goes Skiing* and the Spectrum-only platformer *Horace And The Spiders*. A fourth, *Horace To The Rescue*, was canned when Tang suffered a collapsed lung. He then went on to release *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, *Mugsy's Revenge* and *Asterix And The Magic Cauldron*. Alfred Milgrom says: "William was the first of many university students employed by us during their university vacations, who then came to work for us full time once they'd completed their studies. This was a system that benefited everyone because we were able to introduce the concepts of computer gaming – and the very different programming requirements involved – to computer science students. This was needed because there were no computer game programming classes."



» By the time *Street Hassle* was released, Melbourne House had been taken over by Mastertronic.



» Originally called *T-Wrecks*, this was renamed *Muncher* so that it could be tied in with a sponsorship campaign with sweet brand Chewits.

» *Mugsy's Revenge* was a great comic book-style game. Bubbles showing the 1919 gangster characters' thinking and speaking made for a deep adventure.



» Just one of the many Melbourne House adverts placed in magazines.

management. So in 1986 we looked to sell Melbourne House and concentrate our resources on the development side: Beam Software. The match with Mastertronic seemed to be a good match. Mastertronic at that time concentrated only on budget titles, but wanted to have its own full-price list. This would enable them to have higher margins on the full-price titles as well as a ready-made source of future budget titles."

There was a slight problem for Beam, however. The developer had a difference of opinion with Mastertronic on occasion, something it had not previously faced when it was both the publisher and developer. Mastertronic wanted to make changes to some of the products Beam was developing, and it was not happy with some titles. The delays and rejections also meant Beam Software had less income than projected.

Yet despite all of that, Beam continued. It reverse-engineered the Nintendo NES so it was beginning to create software for the new Japanese console. *Street Hassle*, for instance, was released on the format and Nintendo was so impressed, it gave Beam a developer licence. Andrew Davie, who met wife Ann at Melbourne House, says: "*Street Hassle* was basically a fun fighting game into which we just threw everything oddball we could think of. It was Fred's idea to bounce off the side of the screen, but the characters themselves came from anyone and everyone. I think it was a fun little game, and quite ironic that the same game on the NES was a complete dog." Nevertheless, Beam Software continued to be an independent games developer based in Australia, and even after the sale of Melbourne House it continued to grow as its staff expanded to 25, making it the biggest programming team outside Japan and the US.

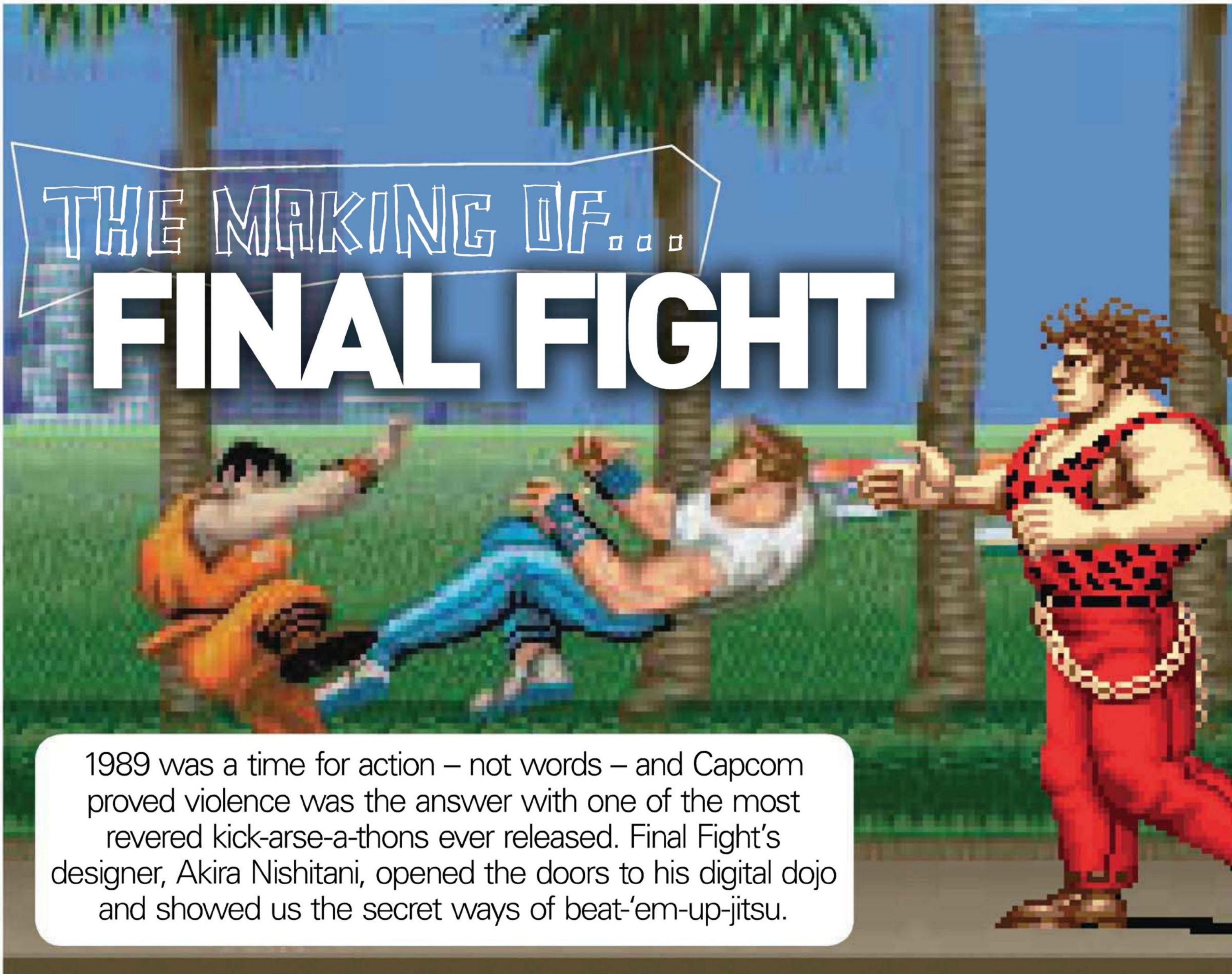
Milgrom says: "As it happened, the sale of the Melbourne House business coincided with a change in the market for games in the UK. This was a time when the UK computers became less exciting – the sale of the Sinclair computer business to Amstrad was a key change, and the Nintendo NES console was making inroads into the US market. By a lucky coincidence, Beam Software had already been exploring and reverse-engineering the NES and it became only the second non-Japanese company to develop games for it."

The computers were not ignored, however. *Exploding Fist +* was released, *T-Wrecks* got a Spectrum-only airing and the brilliant *Bedlam!* was unleashed. Then, it was learned that Mastertronic had hit severe cash flow problems because it had heavily committed itself to developing arcade games using a system based on Amiga technology. Called Arcadia Systems, this subsidiary was a flop since the games were quite poor. The only upshot was that Virgin bought Mastertronic and the firm became the Mastertronic Group. When it was later merged with Virgin Games, the name was changed to Virgin Mastertronic. Then a third change brought about Virgin Interactive Entertainment, and the Melbourne House brand – which Mastertronic had wanted back in 1987 – was being forgotten.

Beam, however, continued regardless and began to flourish into the Nineties. Milgrom comments: "We obviously had little ability to influence the decision makers at Mastertronic/Virgin, so we let them go on their own direction and Beam Software went off on its direction. But that enabled us to begin a second golden period."

Discover what happened to Melbourne House and Beam during the Nineties in part two of this developer lookback on page 134.

"BEAM BECAME ONLY THE SECOND NON-JAPANESE COMPANY TO DEVELOP GAMES FOR THE NES"



THE MAKING OF… FINAL FIGHT

1989 was a time for action – not words – and Capcom proved violence was the answer with one of the most revered kick-arse-a-thons ever released. Final Fight's designer, Akira Nishitani, opened the doors to his digital dojo and showed us the secret ways of beat-'em-up-jitsu.

It wasn't the first 2D, scrolling, two-player co-operative fighting game, and it certainly wasn't the last. Viewed from afar with a slightly cynical tilt of an indifferent head, it wouldn't take much to brand *Final Fight* with the same iron as all the other beat-'em-ups from the arcade's silver age. But through a careful and considered analysis of this intricate genre, Capcom brilliantly distilled the art of the beat-'em-up to create the most refined example ever seen.

We put on our sparring gloves and talked to the co-designer and programmer of *Final Fight*, the high-spirited and enigmatic Akira Nishitani.

THE SUPER GREY PLAYER

"I was born in Tokyo, and as long as I can remember, I always loved to play games: board games, card games – I liked to play any kind of game!" Nishitani begins. "While I was a high-school student I got a part-time job as writer for *Beep!* magazine, mainly concentrating on arcade games. After I graduated from high school, I started to work as a planner. This job has become very important in Japanese game design, but back then it was still quite unusual."

A passion for games and an organic progression toward the arcade is a similar story to that of many accomplished designers we know today. And clearly this passion has not waned. He continues:

"These days I play games more as work than as a hobby, but I still play every day. I think it's very important to someone involved in the industry, although I secretly aspire to be a 'super grey player'! I'm determined to be better than all those young players!" he laughs, striking an accord with retro gamers the world over with his wonderfully esoteric Japanese phrase, "super grey player" (this is a literal translation which is simply too delicious to wilfully alter, but is perhaps best interpreted as "mature, yet respected, gamer").



» Akira Nishitani motivates his troops at Arika – the game developer he established after leaving Capcom.

When *Final Fight* was being conceived, it was a time of change for the entire videogame industry, and Capcom played no small part in ushering in that new age. Akira told us a little about those embryonic days at one of the most historically significant videogame developers.

"[Capcom] was an incredibly lively place, although there weren't actually that many employees when I first started work there. It was great, because everyone felt like we had the opportunity to create our own future.

"At that time, these kinds of action and

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ PCB BOARD



» The arcade flyer depicting the short lived *Street Fighter '89* concept.

» Haggar attempts to persuade Belger, head of the Mad Gear Gang, to stop bothering his daughter.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

X-MEN: CHILDREN OF THE ATOM
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994

FORGOTTEN WORLDS
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1988

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1991



» What does it say about a modern-day sequel when the creator of the original has never even heard of it?

fighting games had only just become popular, so we decided it was the right time to make our own. They had been around for a long time, of course, but to be frank, I don't think these kinds of game were ever much fun for me. I looked at the style of fighting games, and thought to myself "how can I make it more interesting?" That was the beginning" he says with genuine, patriarchal emotion.

STREET FIGHTER '89

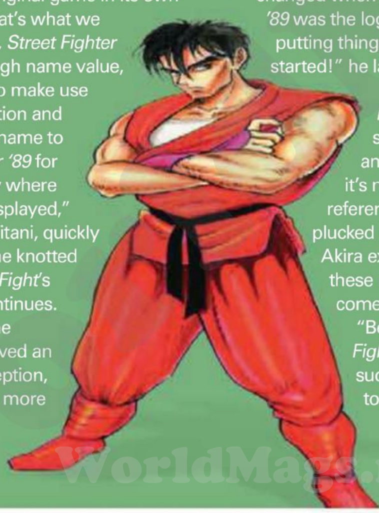
A cursory jaunt around the internet reveals what is probably the most spoken about and historically important aspect of *Final Fight*'s conception: its *Street Fighter* lineage. But that family tree may not be as well rooted as it's been suggested.

It occasionally escapes our notice that the original *Street Fighter* shared little in common with its legendary offspring. *Street Fighter* had gained considerable recognition, but even by 1989 it had been severely tamed by time. There is evidence that suggests *Final Fight* was originally intended to be a sequel to the somewhat damp *Street Fighter* squib, but the monumental differences in gameplay and design somewhat belie that tenuous inheritance. Nishitani-san explained further.

"Our intention was to develop *Final Fight* as an original game in its own right – and that's what we did. However, *Street Fighter* had such a high name value, we decided to make use of its recognition and changed the name to *Street Fighter '89* for a game show where it was first displayed," explains Nishitani, quickly unravelling the knotted rope of *Final Fight*'s origin. He continues.

"At the game show, it received an excellent reception, proving even more popular than we could have hoped. But this really wasn't related to *Street Fighter*. We'd made *Final Fight* as we'd intended – with a totally different and new world view, so once its popularity had been confirmed, we decided to go back to the original name.

"If truth be told, the only thing we ever changed when testing it as *Street Fighter '89* was the logo, so it was no hardship putting things back to how they started!" he laughs.



Although the *Street Fighter* inspiration may stop at a rather abrupt and unchallenged brick wall, it's not the only pop-culture reference ardent fans have plucked from *Final Fight*'s ether. Akira explained how some of these references might have come about.

"Before we developed *Final Fight*, Capcom's president suddenly gathered us all together and said, "The

RELATED GAMES AND SPIN-OFFS

ALSO IN THE SERIES

- **FINAL FIGHT GUY**
- **MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT**
- **FINAL FIGHT CD**
- **FINAL FIGHT 2**
- **FINAL FIGHT 3**
- **FINAL FIGHT REVENGE**
- **FINAL FIGHT ONE**
- **FINAL FIGHT: STREETWISE**

FINAL FIGHT



» Grabbing Edi's gross, used gum when your energy level's full grants a rather spiffing 42910 points in celebration of Nishitani-san's birthday!

"IF TRUTH BE TOLD, THE ONLY THING WE EVER CHANGED WHEN TESTING IT AS STREET FIGHTER '89 WAS THE LOGO" AKIRA NISHITANI



» Upon completion, Guy "persuades" Cody to get back together with Jessica. What are friends for?





» "I suppose Roxy and Poison could be male. We were mildly concerned about getting sued by a feminist group if we beat up women in the game. Whatever you see, that's what they are!" Akira Nishitani comments, regarding the much-debated gender of the enemy characters. They look like chicks to me (at least in the arcade version).



» A keen eye will notice the phrase "NiN" cropping up throughout Capcom's back catalogue, courtesy of Mr Akira Nishitani.

THE BEEF BOWL

A game isn't great unless it's thoroughly infused with hidden references and Easter eggs, and Nishitani let the lid off some beauties from *Final Fight*.

"In Japan everyone knows about a technique called "alchemy". When you smashed up the bucket and drum in *Final Fight*, if you could hit the right button at the right time the items change into lump of gold or a diamond. These are worth 10,000 points each, so it's an indispensable technique for a high score chaser!

"You can get big points on level three, as well. If your character has full energy and picks up the gum which the boss, Edi E, spits out, you receive 42910 points. This is a courage bonus for taking someone else's gross, spat-out gum. The reason you score that strange amount is "42910" is my date of birth – 42nd year of Showa Era [1967], September 10th. Also, if you complete the last level on just one coin, you see the special ending. In Japan, it was called the "*gyudon ending". I'd love your readers to see this awesome ending, but I don't know if foreign editions have it or not. If not, please buy the Japanese edition!"

*Gyudon: literal translation – beef bowl. Don't ask me!



» For those of you who don't have a Japanese version of the arcade machine (shame on you), here's a few clips of the gyudon ending. We can only guess who's who…

future of entertainment is in movies! I'm installing ten TV screens for you. Watch as many different kinds of movies and information as you can find! And, from now on, when you develop a game, you must make its image first!" He ordered us just like that, so from that point on we approached our planning and design as if it were a movie." recalls Akira.

This remark resounds profoundly with another well-spoken rumour about the origins of *Final Fight*'s back story. A considerable number of parallels can be drawn between the game and the 1984 cheese-ball gangster movie, *Streets Of Fire*. Without hesitation (or regard for a conscious breach of Japanese etiquette), the question of their possible relationship is fired at Mr Nishitani. There's a disconcerting pause before his answer arrives although, mercifully, it carries his good-humoured lilt.

"Hmm. At the time, we certainly weren't aware of *Streets Of Fire*, but I've just Googled it and there does indeed seem to be something familiar about it. But then again, this style of story was very popular back then. Lots of fighting games made use of it. I guess we were part of that crowd!" he chuckles, apparently impressed by the investigative prowess fans of his game have gone to over the years.

While we were on the subject, I decided to clarify a couple of other possible allusions from *Final Fight*'s antagonistic cast – specifically Andore, look-alike of the late American wrestler Andre the Giant, and the numerous rock band references.

"I have a friend whose nickname is "Andre", and it's actually him who the characters in *Final Fight* are named after. Of course, I have to admit those characters do look like Andre the Giant, though. Also, we had a woman co-worker who we asked to list as many names as she could think of for our characters. She was really into rock music, so that's why lots of them turned out to be named after band members!"

So it would seem that, despite its clear and defining integration of Eighties pop culture, *Final Fight* is more a part of that ethos than a collection of references to it.

BUILDING METRO CITY

While the basic premise of *Final Fight* might not have blazed any particularly new trails, the gameplay mechanics certainly redefined the way we interacted with the beat-'em-up principle. Of particular note in *Final Fight* are the dramatic differences of the playable characters Guy, Cody and Haggar. The three protagonists offered distinctly individual gaming experiences, allowing players differing gameplay depending on their mood or fighting preference. Whether the player preferred speed and skill over brute force and ignorance, *Final Fight* was the first beat-'em-up to offer that choice.

"This was a feature that took quite a long time to implement. In the end, we prepared the three characters you see in the game as we thought they offered the greatest choice. It just wouldn't be as exciting if they didn't each have a



» "I went to San Francisco once to see *Final Fight* at its first test location. I was so excited, as it was the first time I'd ever been abroad!" Akira Nishitani.



» "I also remember changing the demonstration screen for an overseas version, to try and tone down any sexual elements." – Akira Nishitani. On the left, the Japanese attract screen (and it certainly does!). On the right, the Mary Whitehouse version.



» The second bonus round is considerable tougher than smashing up the car. Break the glass without getting close enough for it to knock your teeth out.



» The 3D one-on-one *Final Fight Revenge* was actually pretty damn good, even if it went mostly unnoticed.

"THIS IS ACTUALLY THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER HEARD OF FINAL FIGHT: STREETWISE! GOOGLE IS REALLY USEFUL!" AKIRA NISHITANI

different journey through the game", Nishitani explains.

Since each playable character had their own moves and their own stylings, the character design work was effectively triple what a developer would expect. This quality of design and depth of dedication is visible throughout *Final Fight*, resulting in the some of the finest character and background graphics a beat-'em-up had ever seen.

"My real challenge was the deep, pseudo 3D space, and how the large sprites interacted with it. There are so many concerns when it comes to adding details to a level. For example, if we add an oil drum, it adds all kinds of processing difficulties. Can the characters climb on the drum? If so, what happens when another character destroys the drum while they're stood on it? Can we have one drum on top of another? It creates a lot of problems, but these details are important and we wanted to create a high-quality game!" Akira laughs, fondly reminiscing about difficulties that, at the time, would undoubtedly not have seemed quite so funny. And yet he's quite correct – true greatness is in the small details. He continues: "Visually I wanted big and detailed characters. I'd liked to have added more enemies and animation frames, and even though *Final Fight* had very good optimising software and the CPS1 board was technically superior, there were as many budgetary and time limitations as there are these days.

"However, I believe that despite those limitations, *Final Fight* was still the best performance game of the time."

PENULTIMATE FIGHT

Final Fight was only really brought back to the arcades in spirit, and not by way of a direct sequel (most notably in the superb *Aliens Vs Predator*). Its real legacy lies with the SNES, though conversions and sequels have seen both success and controversy. Most recently, of course, is the PlayStation 2/Xbox *Final Fight: Streetwise*, though reviews were not kind. I hoped Akira might be able to explain the somewhat shaky philosophy behind this most recent conversion.



» One of the best conversions of *Final Fight* is to be found on the Game Boy Advance.

"I was only involved in the development of the original *Final Fight* coin-op," says Nishitani, once again turning to his computer for a bit of on-the-fly research, "and this is actually the first time I've ever heard of *Final Fight: Streetwise*! Wow! I see it's certainly based on our old game, but I'd never heard of it until now. Google is really useful!" he laughs, showing no signs of the disgruntlement he's more than entitled to harbour toward such uninspired use of his original work.

Despite the industry's trend for deliberately avoiding the wealth of established talent when it comes to reimagining classic games, Akira still has a very fond place in his heart for *Final Fight*, and the horizon harbours a glimmer of hope for a sequel that might finally do justice to the original.

"*Final Fight* is an immortal game, but lately I hardly see any kind of action games. We once again need more interesting varieties, just as we did when we created *Final Fight*. I have lots of detailed ideas, and if I had the chance I'd love to develop a new version."

Eep!



SMASHING!

Game designers had dipped their toes in the shallow pool of between-level-bonus-rounds before, but none had delivered such delectable lashings of unnecessary violence as in *Final Fight*. Nishitani-san told us more about car repairs on the streets of Metro City.

"We definitely wanted to have crash bonus round, and had many ideas, like destroying a piano and a house. There was another idea we developed but didn't use in the end, where players had to beat bad guys until they were buried in the ground up to their shoulders! We decided in the end that smashing up a car would work better visually, however.

"Also, around that time, I don't remember the exact details but there was something in the news about Japanese cars being destroyed because of some Japan-bashing sentiment. That might have affected our decision, too!"

DUCK HUNT

ARE YOU LAUGHING AT ME?



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** LIGHT GUN
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+

HISTORY



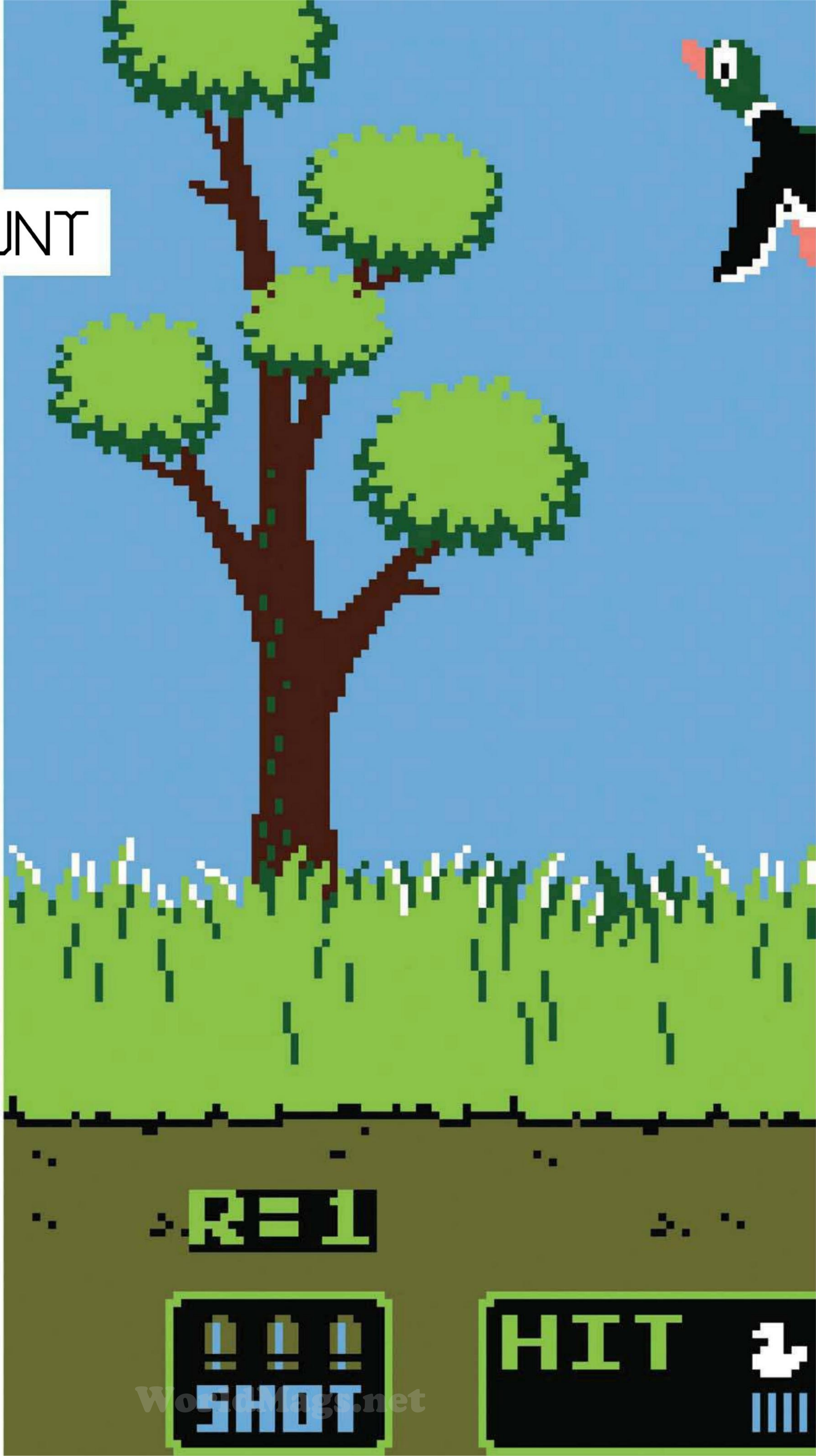
I'm desperate to get my hands on Nintendo's Wii. It's not because it offers a revolutionary way to play games, or the fact that I'll be able to play a brand new *Zelda* game straight away on it (alright, so maybe it's a little bit of that). No, the main reason I'm looking forward to the Wii is because I'm finally going to be able to reacquaint myself with some of my favourite NES games (I sold my collection years ago due to space issues).

While I'll certainly be downloading the likes of *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda* and *Metroid* (assuming they all make the initial launch list) it's *Duck Hunt* that I'm most looking forward to revisiting.

My relationship with this excellent light gun title began nearly 20 years ago when I used to play it in my local Boots while my mum went shopping. *Duck Hunt* would call to me, and I was drawn to it as a moth is drawn to a naked flame. And while I loved every minute I played it for, it always ended in tears (not literally, of course, I was 14 at the time) when I was dragged off the machine at home time.

Fast-forward a few years and I managed to pick up a NES on the cheap at a local car boot for just under £30. It came with a smattering of classic games, including the mighty *Super Mario Bros 3*, but they didn't get a look in as I'd already loaded up *Duck Hunt*.

For all – or in fact because of – its simplicity, *Duck Hunt* remains one of my favourite light gun titles of all time and while it lacks the variety of *Point Blank*, or the sheer excitement that Sega's *House Of The Dead* games manage to offer, it remains an utterly captivating experience that never fails to charm me. And let's face it, how can anyone not be charmed by an on-screen chuckling dog?




000000
SCORE

RETROINSPECTION

NES





WHAT'S IMMEDIATELY NOTICEABLE ABOUT ANY RETELLING OF THE NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM SAGA IS ITS RECOGNISED STATUS AS SAVIOUR OF THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY. WHILE THIS IS CERTAINLY TRUE ON A GLOBAL SCALE, HERE IN THE UK THE NES HAD TO STRUGGLE AND FIGHT TO EARN ITS REPUTATION, NOT LEAST OF ALL AGAINST NINTENDO ITSELF. ALTHOUGH MUCH OF THE ACTION TOOK PLACE IN JAPAN AND THE US, THE INDUSTRY'S KNIGHT IN PLASTIC ARMOUR FACED VERY DIFFERENT BATTLES ON OUR SIDE OF THE POND TO BECOME THE LEGEND IT IS TODAY; AND IT FACED THEM ALONE.

Regardless of wildly erratic release dates, mastermind launch tactics, outstanding tech-specs and bewildering global sales figures, one aspect is paramount over all others: to talk about the NES is to talk about the rebirth of the videogame industry from the fires of a devastating market collapse.

But the industry has always been very much compartmentalised, and trends have never travelled well across the oceans. While America – the feeding ground of the avaricious developer – turned its back on videogames in the early Eighties, the Japanese continued with their normal game-playing lives quite happily, prompting relative newcomer, Nintendo, to bring its flourishing coin-op into homes.

THE HOME VIDEO COMPUTER

This was a more significant change for Nintendo than most gamers ever realised. Up until 1983, Nintendo would've been better described as an electronic toy manufacturer – not a software or game developer. Product ranges from lightgun clay pigeon shooting to electronic love testers were far more synonymous with the name Nintendo than any form of game mascot or living room-based entertainment.

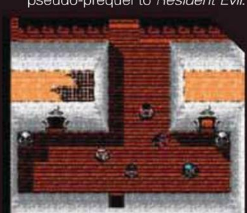
It was only natural for Nintendo to experiment with the *Pong* craze sweeping through the Seventies, and a decent addition to the list was made in conjunction with Mitsubishi in the shape of the TV Game 6 and its unimaginatively named successor, the TV Game 15 (I'll leave you to work out the difference between the two units yourself). Although a worthwhile introduction, the two systems did nothing to persuade Nintendo that home videogames were the future, and efforts shifted organically toward the arcades. Viewing from afar the self-destructive market saturation America was suffering from with home consoles in the late Seventies, Nintendo was resolute that pay-per-play was the only way money could be gleamed from videogames.

Rather astutely, however, it deviated slightly from standard product ranges in 1980 as industry legend Gunpei Yokoi developed the immortal and extraordinarily successful Game & Watch series of handheld LCD units with the help of his friend and colleague, Masayuki Uemura (whom Yokoi had poached from electronics giant Sharp). At the same time, fellow game design prodigy Shigeru Miyamoto was putting the finishing touches on Nintendo's eminent arcade smash, *Donkey Kong*.

This new arcade machine finally broke through the cultural barrier between the East and West, establishing Nintendo as a world gaming power overnight.

Not For Your Eyes

Over the years there have been many titles that either went unreleased, were altered several times before release or were simply never translated from Japanese to English – great games, which were painfully out of our reach. Thankfully in recent years, with the advent of the internet and obsessive fan groups, it's now possible to 'acquire' various unreleased titles, along with Japan-only games which have been fan-translated. Frank Cifaldi's LostLevels.org is one such repository of unreleased games, making available titles like *California Raisins* (the beta cartridge of which sold for around a thousand dollars), *Sunman* and also the uncensored version of *Maniac Mansion*. Elsewhere you can find the official English translation of the unreleased *Earthbound Zero* (a wonderful RPG). For unofficial fan-translations, ROMhacking.net will serve all your needs with access to loads of legal NES language patches. We recommend trying *Sweet Home* – it's an amazing horror RPG by Capcom and a pseudo-prequel to *Resident Evil*.



"THIS NEW MACHINE ESTABLISHED NINTENDO AS A WORLD GAMING POWER OVERNIGHT"





Year released: Japan: July 1985, UK: Late 1987

Original price: Japan: 54800 Yen, US: $199.99, UK: £149.99

Buy it now for: £20+

Associated magazines: None

Why the NES was great… Yes, it was uglier that the Famicom, and the range of games were nowhere near as impressive, but there was still plenty to love about Nintendo's 8-bit console. Beautiful chunky carts came loaded with gaming greatness, and who could resist games like *Super Mario Bros* or *Duck Hunt*?

NES



» The humble NES *Castlevania*, which led to the brilliant *Castlevania IV*. Then the magnificent *Symphony Of The Night*. Then there was *Castlevania 64*, which was… actually, scratch that last one. It was rubbish.

because of its age. The MOS 6502 was designed in 1975 and had already seen considerable use in the videogame industry, primarily in a cut-down version for the Atari 2600 and at the core of both the Apple I and II computers.

By the time Nintendo was drawing up designs for the Home Video Computer (as its first ROM cartridge system was designated during the prototyping stages), the MOS chip was a veritable home computing bargain, weighing in at less than $30 compared to the 68000's $179 price tag. When modified by long-lived Japanese electronics giant Ricoh (who removed the binary decimal mode to make room for 22 extra memory registers for joypad input, sound generation, sprite-based memory access and more), a deluge of game specific blood was squeezed from the revamped 'system-on-a-chip' stone.

THE BIG PUSH

The final few months of development in 1983 brought all the different factions of Nintendo together in a way that united the company like never before. If there was a strength within the company, it was scrutinised, redeveloped and integrated into the renamed Nintendo Family Computer, or Famicom as it quickly became known (the developmental name was still acknowledged, however, in the system's hardware ID, HVC-xxx). The revolutionary control system of Yokoi's Game & Watch handhelds was built into the joypads (what we now rather sanitarily refer to as the D-pad), Miyamoto's *Donkey Kong* arcade stomper was beautifully converted for the launch, strict quality controls were built into future licensing deals and a plethora of peripherals were primed to take the bare bones base unit into the next-generation of home entertainment as soon as the competition showed any signs of panicked response.

"IN AMERICA, THE MARKET HAD DISAPPEARED INTO A BLACK HOLE OF AVARICE, AND ALTHOUGH ALL THE COMPETITION HAD GONE WITH IT, SO HAD THE CUSTOMERS"

Realising this was hot property, Uemera was given the previously uninspiring task of getting Nintendo home-gaming units firmly encamped beneath the TVs of Japan. His brief was at once simple and impossibly demanding: this new Nintendo system must be cheaper and higher quality than the closest competition (don't you just love how the Japanese refuse to pull their punches when it comes to setting targets?).

His concept was equally simple in application, yet intricate in construct. A major factor in Uemera's answer to this difficult question was his unexpected use of the revolutionary MOS 6502 CPU. An equivalent of the popular Motorola 68000 (designed by the same engineering team, in fact), Nintendo's choice of processor was surprising not because of the capability of the chip, but simply

» **Below left:** Originally co-developed by Fuji TV and Nintendo (with heavy Miyamoto involvement) for the Famicom Disk System, *Yume Koujou Doki Doki Panic* went on to be released as SMB2 in the West. **Right:** *Sack Of Flour* is a free homebrew project, showing that even though the NES is no longer around there are still people passionate about it.



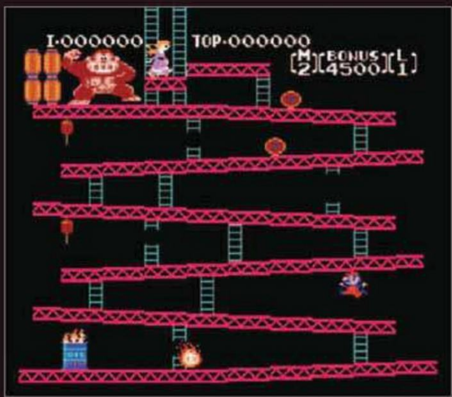


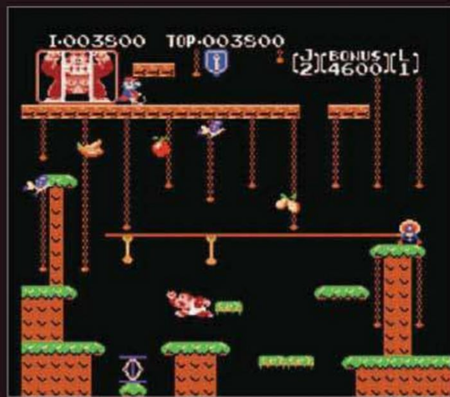
On 15 July 1983, Japanese stores rang to the sound of Nintendo-based sales. But the launch was not without its problems. A glitch between an erratic chipset and their attachment to the motherboard caused consistent reliability issues, and president of Nintendo Hiroshi Yamauchi made a bold decision to recall the entire first batch of Famicoms. The corporate danger of acknowledging an immediate design issue with the new console was, he stated, secondary to maintaining Nintendo's good name in the long term. Apparently the game-playing public agreed, and bearing no grudge against the console's troubled birth, the second release of the Famicom (featuring an entirely new chip set batch with round controller buttons replacing the previously square, prone to sticking, ones) was met with unprecedented success.

Over 500,000 units sold within the first two months of the second Japanese release, and the Famicom was subsequently distributed throughout East Asia. Retailing at ¥14,800, Nintendo managed to shift over 19 million units within its native shore alone during the impressively long lifespan of its beloved console. But over in America, the market had disappeared into a black hole of avarice, and although practically all the potential competition had gone with it, so had the customers.

Much of the feeling around Nintendo was that the cultural divide was simply too great to bridge, and attention was better spent on local retailing. But just as he'd done with the coin-op business, Yamauchi was adamant that Nintendo was going stateside with its games and hardware. Initial licensing and distribution talks with failing Atari quickly fell through, so the task once again fell to the beleaguered, yet proven capable, Nintendo of America.

» In Japan the system didn't launch with *Super Mario Bros.*, instead they received the below three titles. All were conversions of arcade games, and all three have connections to Miyamoto.







Fresh from its successful manufacture, launch and distribution of the *Donkey Kong* coin-op, NoA attempted to reignite the American gamer's consciousness with a somewhat pitiable demonstration of the Nintendo 'Advanced Video System' at the 1984 CES show. Many toy distributors openly laughed at the attempt to sell a games console, while others rushed past in embarrassment or cast vitriolic, vengeful gazes at the videogame hardware that had almost ruined them the year before. It was a categorical disaster.

IT'S NOT A VIDEOGAME. I SWEAR!

A stoutly traditional Japanese man, Yamauchi steadfastly refused to accept the American rejection of his console. So, for the 1985 CES show, the infinitely resourceful NoA team cleverly redesigned the machine into the Nintendo Entertainment System (renamed to remove any connotations of it being a videogame), deliberately creating a featureless, grey brick that in no way resembled a console, adding subtle nuances such as a front-loading cartridge slot intended to make the system blend in with VCRs, distracting consumers from its real purpose as a videogame.

Packaged with a couple of fairly superfluous peripherals, a lightgun called the Zapper and R.O.B. the Robot (a marginally interactive remote controlled toy intended to work together with the games), the actual NES base unit was adequately camouflaged. This backdoor approach helped the system slip under the radar of many toy distributors, and as the Christmas season approached, the second phase of the American plan came into play.



» *Final Fantasy*, ironically titled because Square only had enough money to publish one final game. Luckily it was a huge success.

At considerable peril to their already tenuous branch of the Nintendo Empire, NoA offered New York shop owners a risk-free option for stocking the NES console over the commercial sales period. Nintendo itself would set up the store displays and grant owners a sale or return policy. If the console bombed over Christmas '85, the only ones to lose out would be Nintendo.

The gambit, while not tremendously successful, provided one saving grace for the nervous salesmen at NoA. Consoles didn't fly off the shelves as hoped (moving around 50,000 units), but the steady and hopeful sales reassured shop owners that videogames were once again a viable commodity, and very few actually took Nintendo up on its return offer.

Miyamoto hadn't been sat idle during the US crisis, either, and during 1985 he worked tirelessly to shoehorn his second arcade smash hit, *Super Mario Bros.* into a Famicom cartridge. As always, he was unswervingly successful, and Nintendo collectively saw its opportunity to invade the US once and for all. By October, a Western version was ready to be bundled with the NES console – a tactic designed to coincide with NoA's move to go national with its in-house distribution network.

THE LOCKOUT

Piracy was soon rife in Japan, with cloned Famicom cartridges and cheap knockoff hardware flooding in from all across Asia. The Famicom contained no form of software security other than a strict licensing agreement, which bound third-party developers to Nintendo's command. When the Famicom was redesigned for the world markets, several measures were taken to pre-empt any piracy or unlicensed development.

Some measures were simple and a direct quick-fix to the local troubles. World cartridges were a different shape and pin-out, physically prohibiting the use of Japanese games in non-Asian consoles. A secondary, and far more complex system, was also installed in the NES machines, known as the 10NES regional lockout chip. This chip required security codes (which needed a specific and critical timing system to be applied during the code transfer) to be present on the cartridges, and the only way for developers to get these codes was to ensure their game was licensed by Nintendo.

Over the years Nintendo has been criticised for its militant approach to licensing and security, and many of those claims are

Generation NEX

The long and celebrated life of the NES is currently being put right back on life support in the US by hardware manufacturer Messiah. Its 'new old' console, the Generation: NEX is a neat little unit (not much bigger than two NES cartridges) that accepts and plays all old Nintendo Entertainment System games, whether they're US, European or even for the Japanese Famicom.

Sporting two cartridge slots (one on the top for Famicom games and one in the established 'front loading' position for NES carts), two controller ports identical to Nintendo's proprietary connectors allowing the use of any of your old peripherals, built-in wireless receivers for the additionally available wireless controllers and composite video and audio outputs, this tiny and attractive little unit is surprisingly feature-packed.



"SHOEHORNING SUPER MARIO BROS. INTO A FAMICOM CARTRIDGE WAS UNSWERVINGLY SUCCESSFUL – NINTENDO SAW ITS CHANCE TO INVADE THE US ONCE AND FOR ALL"

NES

"ALTHOUGH E.T. MAY HAVE PUSHED GAMERS OVER THE EDGE, IT WAS MERELY THE ICING ON A PARTICULARLY UNPALATABLE CAKE – NINTENDO WAS ADAMANT THE SAME WOULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ITS CONSOLE"



» This was the first game developed by the creator of *Pokémon*, and actually, it's rather good fun even today! Kick the tiles to knock enemies over and discover secrets.

valid. And yet, as we look back, the edges begin to blur as to the position Nintendo was actually in. The market had only recently collapsed, due in no small part to extreme negligence of the industry, churning out five years of expensive, atrocious-quality games. Although *E.T.* may have finally pushed gamers over the edge, it was merely the icing on a particularly unpalatable cake, and Nintendo was adamant the same would never happen to its console – not after the hardship it had gone through in order to resurrect the market.

To comply with the 10NES lockout system, third-party developers had to sign a strict licensing agreement that limited them to producing only five games a year while granting Nintendo complete discretion when it came to quality control. While the majority of developers balked at such oppressive restrictions, others (such as Capcom, whose carefully chosen first three NES titles, *Commando*, *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* and *1942*, all sold over one million copies) accepted the severe stipulations and proved Nintendo's theories almost immediately.

The early successes were all the reassurance Nintendo needed to enforce its licensing agreement at all costs. Yamauchi had shown from the outset that maintaining a respected reputation was far more important to him than quick sales, and regardless of the incensed twittering of game developers eager to flood the market with mediocre games, his chokingly tight reins undoubtedly helped the console enjoy such a long life.

Unfortunately, not all developers agreed with Nintendo's philosophy, least of all the English ones.

SALE-ING THE SEVEN SEAS

The story of Nintendo's Japanese and American establishment has been well told, but there are a lot of other countries with a dedicated gaming population. In truth, Nintendo could reasonably ignore any other sales avenues as long as the Japanese and Americans were living and breathing videogames, and the European introduction was reduced to nothing short of a stilted, insulting addendum to an otherwise grand plan.

Unenthusiastic distribution deals began to filter NES consoles into Europe in late '86, beginning in Scandinavia and Germany, then spreading into Spain and France before finally being brought to the UK by Mattel in the third quarter of 1987. A distinct lack of interest from Nintendo itself, coupled with Mattel's reputation as a toy company and a delay, which took the console out of the technological heats, made for a hurdle that was far too high to vault in one leap.

The Sega Master System had hit the UK ground running, and while the American market may have disappeared up its own... disk drive earlier in the decade, this had created a wealth of opportunity in Britain for affordable home computers. Competing with the superior, and better established, Sega machine was one thing, but taking on the likes of the ZX Spectrum and its prolific catalogue of games on its home turf, or the astounding next-generation gaming power of the Amiga, was another entirely.

Sega claims a great deal of responsibility for ensuring the NES never gained a foothold in the European market, though in truth much of the culpability lies with Nintendo's own indifference to Europe, and the UK in particular.

Its attention was still firmly trained on the US and Japan, where attention returned to the original concept of the Famicom – the family computer. Peripherals to deliver on the promise made by the system's name were steadily released: a disk drive, cassette deck, keyboard, modem and BASIC cartridges were all developed, with varying degrees of success, to allow Japanese Famicom owners to expand the potential of their prized machines.

By the time Nintendo International was established to take over from Mattel, Sega was tearing full steam ahead with the Mega Drive. This was the first chink in Nintendo's armour since 1983, and by ignoring the European markets, the company gave Sega the opportunity to maintain its developments and plan a strategy to work its way back into the primary markets. While Nintendo threw lawsuits about the place to sustain its dominion (attempting to stop everything from Rare's reverse-engineering of the 10NES lockout chip to Codemaster's Game Genie peripheral and the various attempts at releasing unlicensed third-party software), Sega embraced many of the other companies and their videogaming products, granting them a platform while shoring up its increasing market share.



» Does anyone else remember the Super Mario Bros 3 advert that had Mario's face made up of all the children in the world? We do.

Famicom Love

The original concept of the Famicom (being a 'family computer') was reasonably explored with some great add-ons like the Disk System, keyboard, modem and a BASIC system. Some great games came out for the FDS (Famicom Disk System) that we never got to see. NES cartridges had a functionality removed that, on the Famicom, allowed games to access external sound hardware and produce far superior in-game audio. Conversions of Famicom games that took advantage of this feature are very noticeable by their underdeveloped internal audio.

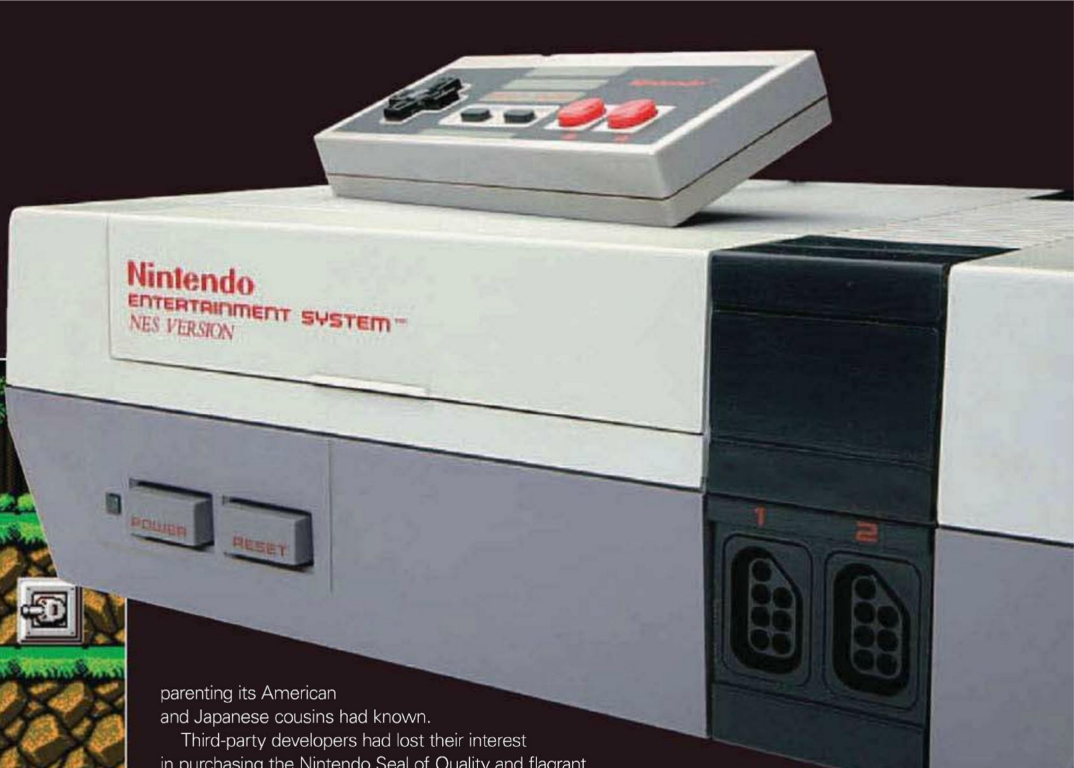
The Famicom had no lockout system, which, other than making piracy easier, allowed Japanese developers like Capcom, Konami and others to add improved technology to their game cartridges and provide technically advanced games. The 10NES lockout system in our machines prevented these technical improvements from working.

The Famicom's top-loading cartridge slot proved considerably more reliable over time, being less prone to collecting oxidising dust on the edge connectors and being damaged by the sheering force of a misaligned cartridge entry (oo-er).





» *Metal Gear* didn't start out on the NES, fair enough, but it was the system Kojima wanted to develop for, and it was eventually ported – albeit in a butchered form.





» Konami was generally regarded as the best of the third-party developers, creating classic after classic, like *Contra* here.

Aside from the shabby marketing, the late '87 UK release date of the console would have been the perfect time to own a NES. The harsh whips of Nintendo had ensured five years of only the finest games were ready and waiting. Developers had found their programming feet, while Nintendo's internal teams had fully dedicated their elite to making first-party titles. *Super Mario Bros.* came bundled for the reasonable price of £69.99 while the westernisation of Shigeru Miyamoto's celebrated *Legend Of Zelda* (the first cartridge to contain a battery backup save game feature) landed, quite by chance, at exactly the right time to reassure UK NES users.

Million-sellers were becoming increasingly common, yet the company's belief in its own divine status began to push developers to question the gospel and, thanks to the massive profits Nintendo's quality regime had imposed upon them, they had the power to push the limits. Nintendo's authority was slipping.

THERE ARE NO ENDS – ONLY NEW BEGINNINGS

Being abandoned in Europe had given the console the opportunity to grow on its own, unhindered by the Victorian parenting its American and Japanese cousins had known.



» Squint. No, squint harder. In fact, squint hard enough and this almost looks like *Metroid Prime*. Almost… well, if you're a tramp drunk on meths. Otherwise probably not.

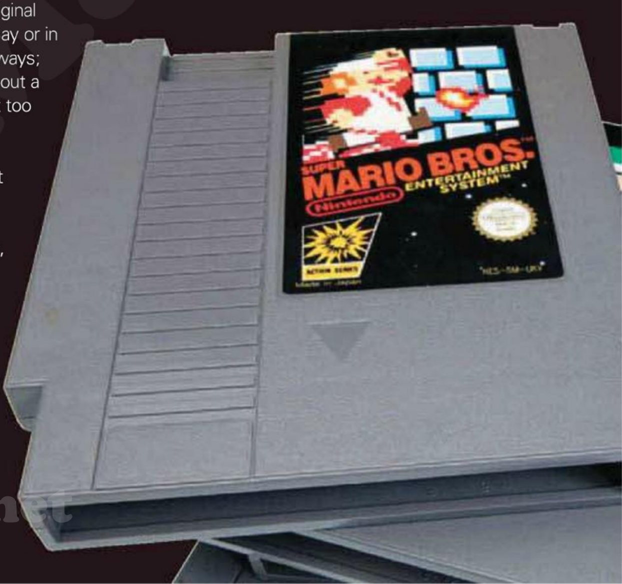
Third-party developers had lost their interest in purchasing the Nintendo Seal of Quality and flagrant importing began all across Europe. The few Italian NES owners discovered they were in the same retailing bracket as the better-supported UK, while Scandinavians openly swapped games among themselves and the Spanish. Cartridges were even developed that fired a voltage spike through the irksome 10NES chip, knocking it out and allowing unrestricted international sales of one development.

The Famicom and the NES had a strong following, but times had changed dramatically from the post-apocalyptic wasteland the machine was born into. The system was simply unable to provide the technologically advanced arcade conversions gamers were demanding. Yet this new loose-leash publishers were enjoying with NES cartridges provided a crutch, which enabled the console to enter old age more gracefully than any other system had managed before it.

It was midway through the Nineties, and although people weren't queuing up to buy NES games at midnight, neither did they resent picking up the odd Nintendo bargain even as late as 1996. By this time, the NES had once again been redesigned to account for, among other things, failing cartridge connectors, which had suffered from their horizontal orientation and gathered enough oxidising dust over the years to force users to bend and twist their games to coerce reliability from the struggling components.

Another price drop to £49.99 (seeing the console actually being out-priced by one of its own games for a short while) didn't hurt the life expectancy of the old campaigner either, and as the internet began to fully emerge, fan sites, homebrew programmers, hardware hackers and dedicated gamers began to form communities in celebration of Nintendo's grandfather console. Just as before, the NES didn't break any new sales figures but, along with its games, miraculously managed to retain its original value. Even today, NES games on eBay or in a charity shop are certainly not giveaways; five quid will buy you a cartridge without a box or instructions, but little else. Not too shabby for a 25-year old format.

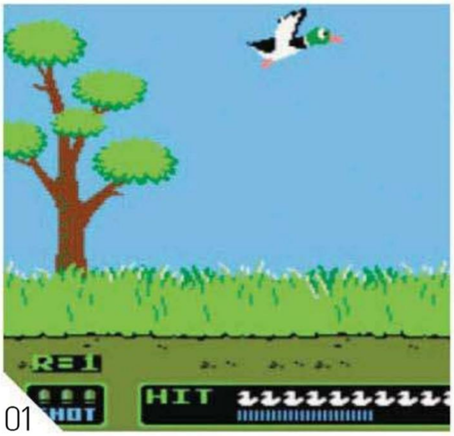
If anything, the impressively long life of the NES may actually have hurt Nintendo – dissuading players from upgrading to the Super NES upon demand – but it'd be hard for anyone, least of all its parent company, to resent this amazing machine for providing hundreds of thousands of hours of entertainment, billions of Yen in profit and 60 million gamers worldwide with something incredible to do with their thumbs.





NES PERFECT TEN GAMES

For owners without the cartridge cleaning kit; here are ten of the best wedges of grey plastic you'll ever blow into.



01

DUCK HUNT

» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DONKEY KONG*

01 Billed as the quintessential game for the clunky NES Zapper, Nintendo's repetitive duck-murdering simulator allowed gamers to test their aim with the aid of canine-cohort, Mr Peepers. It was his job to startle a ball of petrified feathers into the air and yours to sight them in your pistol's crosshair. You had three shots per target and the later levels, which included infinitesimal clay pigeons, called for either a swift dead-aim or the cowardly act of pressing the gun barrel against the television. The game had a neat feature, which allowed duck-welfare enthusiasts to control the direction of the fleeing birds with a second pad and save them from a good buckshot stuffing.

SUPER MARIO BROS

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *F-ZERO*

02 It was the block punching, pipe-travelling exploits of two Italian plumbers that finally administered the medicine to the videogame crash of the Eighties, ridding it of the noxious Martian antibodies of Atari's *ET*. Shigeru Miyamoto knew how to conjure up golden game icons and the Mario Bros are two of his most prolific. Placing the plumbers into a daring princess/mushroom rescue mission, inside a vivid, smooth-scrolling fantasy world, the game pioneered concepts such as level warping and head stomping. *Super Mario Bros* encapsulates everything that makes a game timeless: catchy theme, fluid gameplay, iconic characters and a hot princess.



02

RIVER CITY RANSOM

» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNOS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DOUBLE DRAGON*

03 Punchbags meet sick bags when Alex and Ryan receive a note from evil crime lord Slick informing them their city is being held to ransom and Ryan's girlfriend has been abducted. Welcome to *River City*, a place of tongue-in-cheek humour, cartoon violence and hard-up vomiting freshmen. Using anything they can lay their fists on, our protagonists set about the streets fighting through Slick's army of students. Their strategy: force them to 'barf' and pocket their loose change. *River City*'s unique fusion of a scrolling beat-'em-up and a subtle RPG make it a superlative NES classic.

MEGAMAN 2

» **RELEASED:** 1998
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *DEVIL MAY CRY*

04 Don't let *Megaman*'s mountainous energy bar fool you, trying to finish *Megaman 2* is like trying to stay alive without any kidneys. This is an unforgiving platform blaster where each level demands pinpoint precision and patience. The order in which you blast through Dr Wily's levels is up to you, but don't think you can use the easier stages to stockpile lives. Each level houses a bionic-boss whose special power can be acquired. These abilities give Megaman an advantage over another boss, so choosing your route through the game was how you maintained a healthy blood pressure.

PUNCH-OUT!!

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *LYLAT WARS*

05 Nintendo's port of its popular Eighties arcade puncher was somewhat lost in translation when it appeared in its 8-bit glory. The arcade's transparent fighter was omitted and in his corner stood a pale, pint-sized pugilist on a mission to topple heavyweight hard-man, Mike Tyson. It quickly collected acclaim for its accessibility and colourful roster of cartoon boxers who were forced to sop up each blow of the game's trademark playability. The NES homes the finest version of *Punch-Out!!*, still managing to pack more punch than its technically enhanced SNES sequel and arcade counterpart.



03

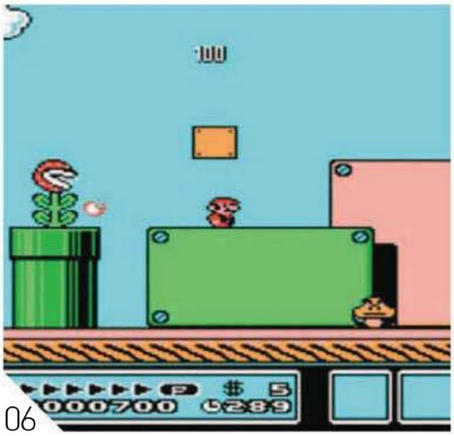


04



05




06


07


08

SUPER MARIO BROS 3

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *PILOTWINGS*

06 Mario's goodbye gift to the NES is a marvel. It encapsulated all the qualities of the first game while introducing new elements now seen as essential to the series as Mario's flat cap and black moustache. *Super Mario Bros 3* incorporated sub-bosses, multiple routes and mini-games, while embracing the notions of secrets and level warping. In fact, the game's so great, millions of Americans stood in unity to create a large image of his head using colourful T-shirts. Visible from space, it was a warning to ET to never release another game on our planet.

METROID

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *SUPER METROID*

07 Long before Ms Croft raided her first tomb, there was another tough female playing a central role in an iconic franchise. Donning unflattering yellow armour and forced to wear a red spaceship on her head, you really couldn't tell whether Samus Aran was man, woman or beast. But one bash of the B button, sparking her elegant flip, gave us all the proof we needed. *Metroid* is a landmark NES title, the space shooter introduced password saves, nonlinear levels and multiple endings. Its dark, menacing setting housed some truly freaky inhabitants, and the Giger-style levels really helped emanate a bleak, lonely atmosphere from inside the grey box.

CONTRA

» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *METAL GEAR*

08 It must be written into our genes that when visited by an alien it's customary to either destroy them or try to adopt them. *Mario Bros* on steroids, the homeport of Konami's arcade hit *Contra* is considered to be the finest run-and-gun on the NES. It tells the story of two marines who are assigned the mission of welcoming an alien species by unloading an ungodly amount of ammunition into their deformed domes. The game presents some inspired character and level designs, the most memorable being the breach of an alien base, which switched the perspective from a side-scrolling blaster to a Cabal-style shooting gallery.



09

DOUBLE DRAGON 2 – THE REVENGE

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNOS
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

09 Taking on a darker tone than its predecessor, *Double Dragon 2* still follows the theme of the Lee brothers' ill luck with the opposite sex. After their abducted girlfriend, Marian, is callously killed by Shadow Warrior, the brothers are forced into action. It's widely considered to be the finest of the three *Double Dragon* games released on the NES, due to its intuitive controls. It also introduced a much requested two-player co-op option and iconic moves like the Whirlwind Kick and the Hyper Uppercut – which looked a lot cooler than Billy and Jimmy's usual technique of pushing an enemy's head into their groin.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

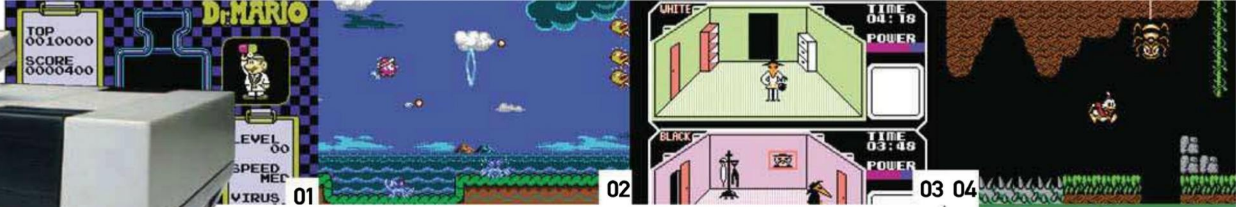
» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *YOSHI'S ISLAND*

10 Sheathed inside a majestic gold cartridge, *The Legend Of Zelda*'s tale of a nefarious powermonger, an ensnared princess and an elfin boy, bound together by unlikely heroism, was a chameleon of game genres that pioneered open-ended gameplay. Link's first quest not only popularised adventure games, it established pivotal precedents that spoke out to all platforms. It outmoded high-score tables by exposing a greater desire in gamers for exploration and completion, and encapsulated perhaps the most respected and well-loved games ever created. It was fathered by Nintendo with a proud tenderness and the NES was there to videotape the birth.



10

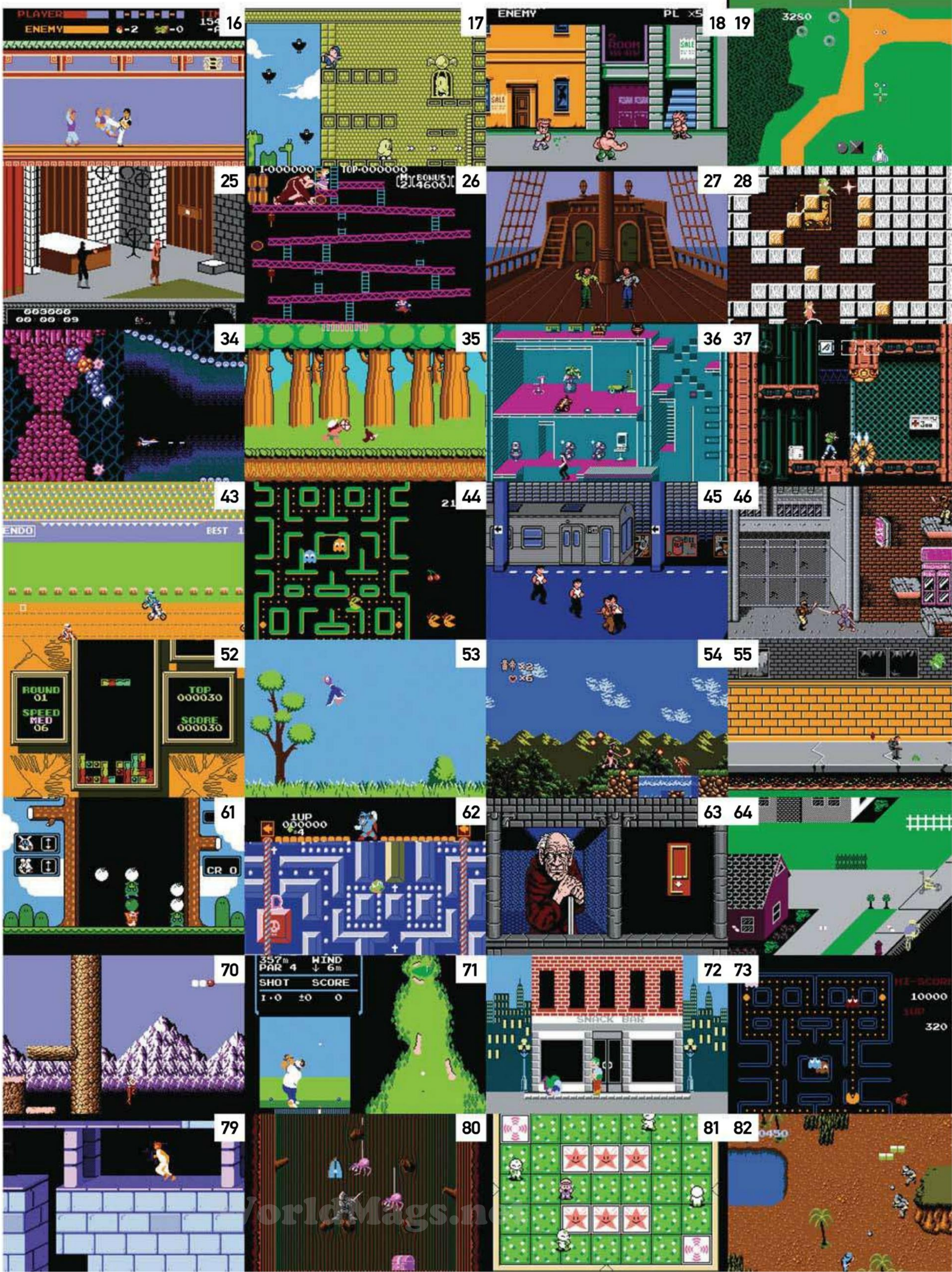




NES and the rest...

There were literally hundreds of games for Nintendo's 8-bit console, ranging from the truly amazing to the terribly dire. Here are just a few of them.

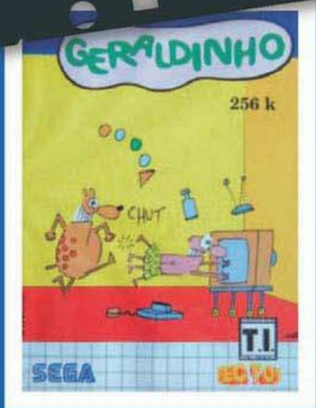


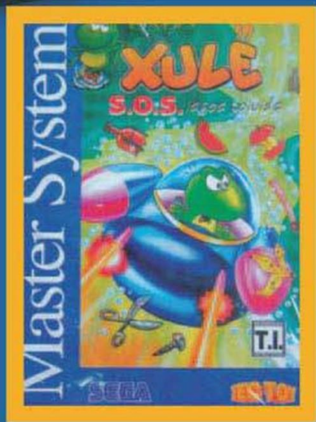


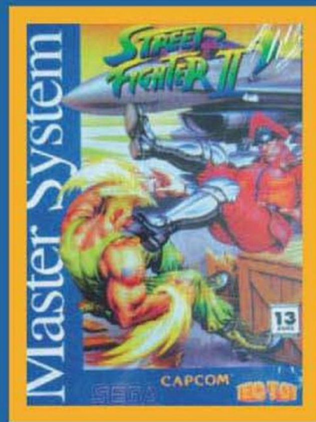
01 DR MARIO
02 PARODIUS
03 SPY VS. SPY
04 DUCK TALES
05 IKARI WARRIORS
06 ROADBLASTERS
07 ARKANOID
08 GALAGA
09 LODE RUNNER
10 SOCCER
11 GUN-SMOKE
12 BALLOON FIGHT
13 MANIAC MANSION
14 ROD LAND
15 COBRA TRIANGLE
16 KUNG FU
17 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
18 MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT
19 XEVIOUS
20 LEMMINGS
21 BLUE SHADOW
22 THE GOONIES II
23 PUYO PUYO
24 SUPER MARIO BROS
25 THE LAST NINJA
26 DONKEY KONG
27 PIRATES!
28 SOLOMON'S KEY
29 CASTLEVANIA
30 KICK OFF
31 RAMPAGE
32 GAUNTLET II
33 BASEBALL
34 LIFE FORCE
35 ADVENTURE ISLAND
36 IMPOSSIBLE MISSION II
37 SHATTERHAND
38 DOUBLE DRAGON
39 LUNAR POOL
40 RIVER CITY RANSOM
41 TENNIS
42 METAL GEAR
43 EXCITEBIKE
44 MS PAC-MAN
45 RENEGADE
46 NINJA GAIDEN
47 GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS
48 CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE
49 BIONIC COMMANDO
50 MEGA MAN
51 STAR WARS
52 TETRIS 2
53 DUCK HUNT
54 HUANG DI
55 GHOSTBUSTERS II
56 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
57 ICE HOCKEY
58 SUPER MARIO BROS 2
59 TRACK & FIELD 2
60 THE ADVENTURES OF BAYOU BILLY
61 WARIO'S WOODS
62 DEVIL WORLD
63 SWORDS AND SERPENTS
64 PAPERBOY
65 RAMBO
66 PROBOTECTOR
67 FINAL FANTASY
68 CABAL
69 M.U.L.E.
70 RYGAR
71 GOLF
72 URBAN CHAMPION
73 PAC-MAN
74 SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
75 ROBOCOP
76 1942
77 YOSHI'S COOKIE
78 ICE CLIMBER
79 PRINCE OF PERSIA
80 WIZARDS & WARRIORS
81 QUINTY
82 COMMANDO
83 PUNCH-OUT!!
84 RUSH 'N ATTACK
85 SIDE POCKET
86 A BOY AND HIS BLOB
87 FANTASTIC DIZZY

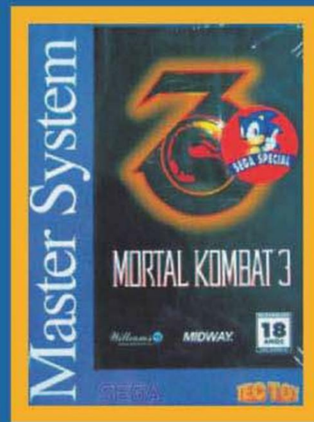

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OK! THIS LOOKS LIKE THE OLD MANSION.
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PLAYBALL
NINTENDO
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TRASH PICK-UP
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I'M GETTING SLEEPY!!
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TEC TOY

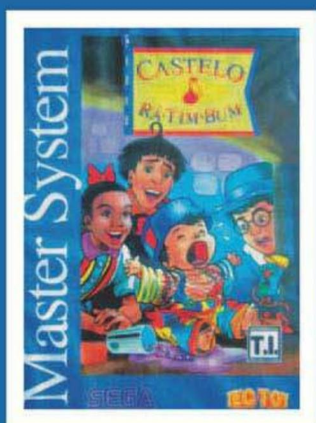

GERALDINHO
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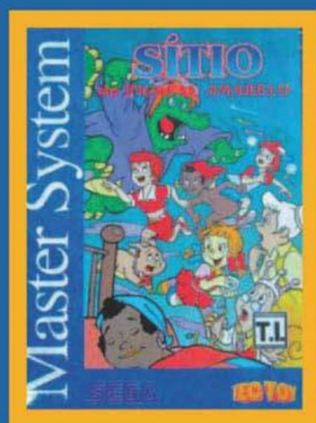

Master System
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SEGA
TEC TOY

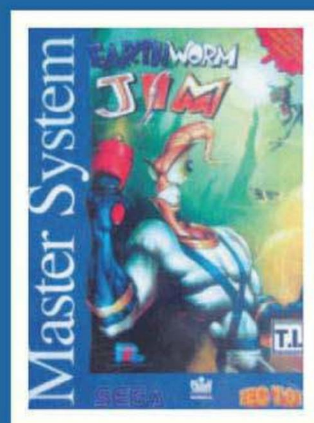

Master System
STREET FIGHTER II
13
CAPCOM
SEGA
TEC TOY

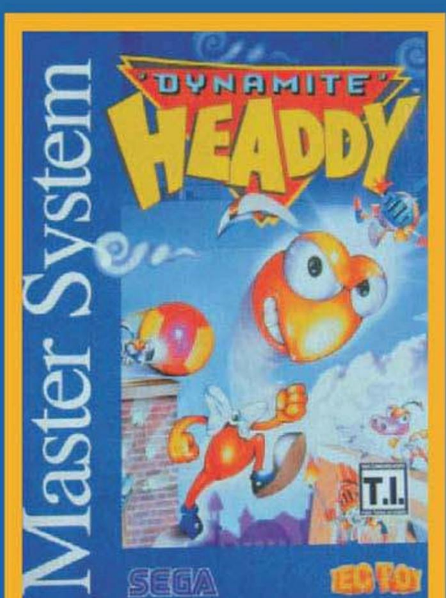

Master System
SEGA SPECIAL
MORTAL KOMBAT 3
MIDWAY
18
SEGA
TEC TOY

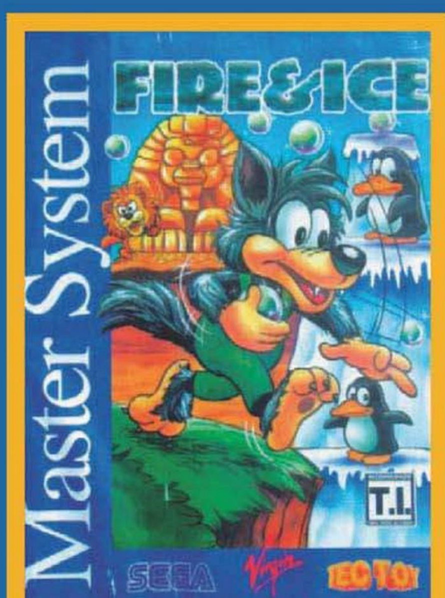

Master System
TURMA DA Mônica
T.I.
SEGA
TEC TOY

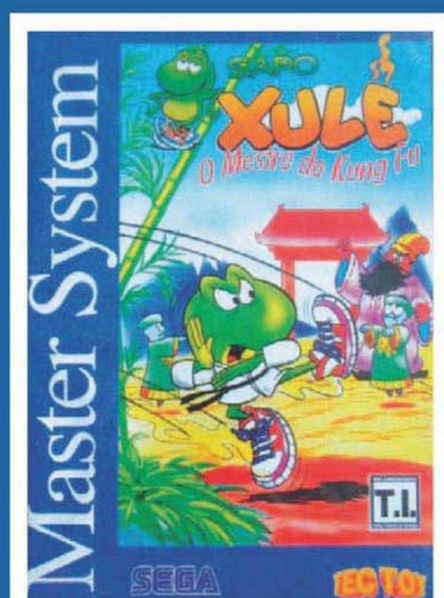

Master System
CASTELO RA-TIM-BUM
T.I.
SEGA
TEC TOY


Master System
SÍTIO
T.I.
SEGA
TEC TOY


Master System
EARTHWORM JIM
T.I.
SEGA
TEC TOY


Master System
DYNAMITE HEADDY
T.I.
SEGA
TEC TOY


Master System
FIRE&ICE
T.I.
SEGA
Virgin
TEC TOY


Master System
SAPO XULÉ
O Mestre do Kung Fu
T.I.
SEGA
TEC TOY

SEGA LIVES ON

John Szczepaniak returns to Brazil and speaks directly with Tec Toy's president, while acquiring world-exclusive photography, solving a mystery and taking the time to sample some games.

Most people in the Northern hemispheres of Japan, America and Europe won't know the name Tec Toy, but it's one of the most significant videogame companies in existence. This is not because of its incredibly close partnership with Sega (one of the closest for a non-Japanese company), or because it's the only company still manufacturing Sega hardware. It's all of these things and the fact they struggled against the odds to create a successful and wholly legitimate company in a region rife with piracy.

To get a full and accurate account of events we spoke to the current president of this Brazilian company, Mr Stefano Arnhold, who joined only a few months after it started. He explained the early days, "Tec Toy was founded in September 1987 by Mr Daniel Dazcal and the two Kryss brothers, Leo and Abe, owners of Evadin, a traditional TV manufacturer under the Mitsubishi brand. I only joined the company in December 1987, invited by Mr Dazcal, my former boss at Sharp in Brazil." As shown, the four gentlemen involved in the new start-up all had experience with electronics companies; success in the future seemed within their grasp. Their plan had been to create "intelligent toys" using modern technology, and to cater them specifically to the local market.

Another factor of their success relates to an exceptional regional anomaly. The Brazilian government in 1967 created a Free Economic Zone in the state of Amazonas, called "Zona Franca de Manaus." The region was intended to be exempt from several taxes, including importing and industrial tax, thereby enabling new industries to form and grow, hopefully boosting the economy. It was in this area that Tec Toy built manufacturing plants and later also the Daniel Dazcal Foundation in Manaus City (see boxout). Arnhold elaborated, "Basically all consumer electronics are assembled in the Industrial Pole of the Free Zone of Manaus due to tax incentives, and Tec Toy chose to have its plant there for the same reason."

They expanded quickly, opening several offices and warehouses throughout Brazil. Their steps towards partnering with Sega were tentative at first, involving not games but a laser-tag device. "In 1987 we contacted Sega and our first licensed product was a toy called Zillion, a laser-tag game introduced in April 1988. The product was fully manufactured in Brazil." It resembled the Master System lightgun and was originally marketed in Japan, based on the phaser featured in the Japanese anime of the same name, (which actually went on to become two licensed games for the Master System, resulting in several separate products all with the same name, Zillion).

After this came the jump to videogames. They had met all the prerequisites needed to represent Sega in South America but, as Arnhold explains, they'd already proven themselves capable in Sega's eyes. "I think that after our success with Zillion, they saw that we were the best option for Brazil." Indeed they were, going on to become the most successful legally endorsed games company in the country. He continues, "After the successful experience with Zillion we introduced the Master System in September 1989. Due to an aggressive marketing strategy Master System took the lead in the 8-bit market in Brazil, beating Nintendo, and in 1990 we introduced Mega Drive, which also led the 16-bit market."

They also created interesting variations of hardware, like the Master System Super Compact. This curious little device was a wireless handheld system, except instead of a dedicated screen it directly transmits visual information to the nearest TV via a small aerial. It was later re-released in neon pink as the "Master System Girl", with a shift in the intended target audience. It was through Tec Toy that Sega's 8-bit debut received its greatest success (remembering it had been beaten by the NES elsewhere), and it continued being marketed as the rest of the technophile world moved on. Nintendo only officially entered the region quite late and was unable to compete against the bootleg NES systems already available or the might of Tec Toy, who had built up a strong following and a reputation for quality. This gives Tec Toy the rare honour of being the only hardware company to beat Nintendo in the 8-bit console market. After partnering with Sega things got very interesting.



» The Zillion laser-tag game was Tec Toy's first Sega licence. (UK version pictured, courtesy of John Phillips.)



» There was no Sega system left untouched in Brazil. Here we see *Ecco Jr* for the educational Pico system.



» While most companies are only just waking up to pink systems, Tec Toy had been doing it years ago.

IN THE KNOW

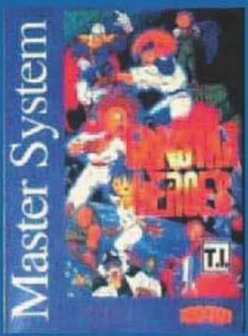
Founded in 1987, Tec Toy went on to successfully partner Sega and marketed all of Sega's systems in Brazil, with much success. They also modified the hardware to suit the native market, localised several titles using popular cartoon characters and ported many games to the Master System, which were exclusively sold in Brazil. An amazing success story, Tec Toy continues to thrive and still markets Sega products.



» Daniel Efraim Dazcal, the founder of Tec Toy. Admired by all who knew him, he's described as ethical and someone who cared about his employees.

COLLECTORS ITEMS

Tec Toy released many oddities that are now highly sought after by the hardcore underground collective, specifically their many Master System variations and accompanying exclusive games. The most controversial, though, is the alleged SMS version of *Gunstar Heroes* which turned up on eBay several years ago (see image). But the auction was stopped early and some gormless people started speculating hysterically. So we asked the president of Tec Toy, was such a game ever released? His exact and unedited words were, "*Gunstar Heroes* was only launched for 16-bit." So there you have it loyal readers, concrete proof that the eBay auction started all those years ago, and subsequently reported in various magazines, was actually a hoax. Another mystery solved by everyone's favourite retro magazine. We are good to you.



TEC TOY



» Tec Toy also dabbled with Sega's slightly less successful systems, the Sega CD and 32X.



AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

Mortal Kombat 3 (SMS)

Tec Toy were not infallible and they did publish some poor games. In our mind the worst was Master System *Mortal Kombat 3* by Software Creations. Not a great game to begin with, porting it to such an underpowered system sucked whatever life was originally in it. A valiant objective, but still terrible.

Tec Toy started building relationships with other foreign companies, such as Capcom, Tyco, Electronic Arts, Acclaim, Midway, Williams and others. This gave access to many games released abroad, which Tec Toy then translated into Portuguese (including several large RPGs like *Phantasy Star*), while adapting some using local cartoon characters. *Ghost House* became *Chapolim Vs Drácula: Um Duelo Assustador*, featuring characters from a Mexican TV show which was hugely successful in Brazil. *Asterix* became *Adventuras Da TV Colosso* and *Teddy Boy* became *Geraldinho*.

Interestingly, *Psycho Fox*, *Kung Fu Kid*, and *Astro Warrior* were all localised into a strangely connected trilogy of *Sapo Xule* games, starring an environmentally conscious frog. Meanwhile, *Wonderboy* games had the main character replaced by a girl, Monica, and her friends from a famous Brazilian comic.

The most exciting element about Tec Toy is not its localisations, but the games that were released only in South America. Several were ports of Game Gear games (a system few could afford, while the architecture was nearly identical to the SMS), such as *Virtua Fighter Animation* and *Dynamite Headdy*. They also snapped up the publishing rights to games left in limbo, such as *Fire And Ice* (SMS) and *Nightmare Circus* (MD). Plus they developed their own games (mostly licences) such as *Street Fighter 2*, *Ferias Frustadas Do Pica Pau* (*Woody Woodpecker Vacations*) and *Sitio Do Pica Pau Amarelo*, which was based on a children's book and a 20-in-1 SMS multi-cart bundled with consoles.

Arnhold then picked up the story of how things progressed over the years, eventually moving beyond the Brazilian market and into neighbouring countries: "In 1988, after our first full year in the market, Tec Toy launched 45 products and became the number two toy manufacturer in Brazil. In 1991 the Game Gear was introduced and turnover reached US$ 100 Million, and by 1992 we were already the largest toy manufacturer in the country. Our promotional investment reached US$ 10 Million and we started operations in Argentina and Uruguay, as Sega gave us the task to co-ordinate all MERCOSUL markets."

But then tragedy struck as the founder, Mr Daniel Efraim Dazcal, sadly passed away in May 1992 at the age of 42, having created and built up one of South America's most successful companies. Of course, this didn't hold the company back, and the fiery passion of Tec Toy prevailed.

Stefano Arnhold finished by speaking about their peak, "In 1993 the company went public with shares traded in the São Paulo Stock Exchange and we also introduced PC Games. In 1994 our Sega Club reached 200 thousand active members (the Club now has more than one million members) and in 1995 we introduced the Sega Saturn. In 1996 we reached the mark of 2MM consoles sold and our hotline was receiving 50 thousand calls a month. Over the next year we entered the internet market as a full internet and content provider under license from Compuserve. In 1999



» In their first year, along with the Zillion laser-tag gun, Tec Toy released the Pense Bem, a kind of educational computer toy.

GAMES REVIEWS



YUYU HAKUSHO – SUNSET FIGHTERS

1999 TREASURE

» Treasure's classic beat-'em-up, allowing for up to four simultaneous players, only saw release in Japan and (eventually) Brazil, thanks to Tec Toy. It's one of the best console fighters of the 16-bit era, eclipsing even the ports of *Street Fighter*. You can fight opponents to your left and right, while moving between horizontal planes. Full of Treasure's trademark style, Brazil was lucky to have seen its release. **95%**



STREET FIGHTER 2

1997 TEC TOY

» Attempting to cram *Street Fighter 2* into a Master System cartridge is rather daring. But in 1997 Tec Toy officially licensed and developed a version for Sega's 8-bit wonder; their attempt was the only official 8-bit console version. Unfortunately it doesn't quite work, with dodgy collision detection and about three animation frames for each of the eight fighters (several are missing). But we love it anyway, for its sheer tenacity and fun two-player mode. **65%**



MASTER SYSTEM 3 COLLECTION – 120 SUPER JOGOS

2006 TEC TOY

» Tec Toy continues to release updates of their multi-game systems, with the latest Master System 3 having 120 games. The majority of titles are classics such as *The New Zealand Story*. Even with XE.com saying the Brazilian price is around £60, the fact it also has a cartridge slot makes this excellent value for money. If only they worked on British TVs. **N/A**



DUKE NUKEM 3D

1998 3D REALMS

» Ported in Brazil by Tec Toy thanks to a sub-licensee, this was another daring attempt to push the ageing Mega Drive further than before. It isn't so much a port as a new game using the same themes – the levels are wholly different. Commendably the scrolling is very smooth (sometimes too smooth), but what lets it down is the MD's limited colour palette. The visuals are painfully grainy, making things difficult to see and the game overly challenging. **68%**



20-EM-1

1995 TEC TOY

» A selection of very simple timed (around 1 minute each) SMS mini-games, with bright and colourful graphics, where the only objective is to work out what to do and get as high a score as possible. In all likelihood it's probably aimed at children, but for some reason, despite the rudimentary visuals and sound, there's a compelling urge to keep improving your score. This image is from a game where you make a mouse jump for cheese. **80%**



MEGA DRIVE 3 – 71 SUPER JOGOS

2006 TEC TOY

» Another unique hardware release from Tec Toy. Containing a great collection of much loved titles, and at roughly £70 with the ability to still play new cartridges, it's a wonderful item! Curiously, while having the third instalments of *Sonic* and *Shinobi*, it's missing earlier versions. Despite lacking bundled RPGs and maybe a few common favourites, you honestly can't complain with 71 games! **N/A**


» Stefano Arnhold (Tec Toy President), Mr David Rosen (founder of Sega) and Mr Sakurai (Executive Director of Sega), make history by joining forces.


» Stefano Arnhold with Mr. Nakayama (Sega President), when Tec Toy gave him an amethyst to celebrate the ten-year partnership (1987-1997).

Dreamcast was introduced."

As for Tec Toy's proudest achievements over the years? This question raised some surprises. Along with the expected comments on besting Nintendo and gaining market supremacy, Stefano revealed some information regarding the internet and online banking. It turns out that the Japan-exclusive services mentioned in *Retro Gamer* 27's Mega Drive article, also made their way to South America! As he explains, "We'd beaten Nintendo in the 8-bit market – a statement that very few people can make. We'd introduced in 1995 a Mega Drive accessory that brought people the internet (mainly email) and in 1996 the same technology permitted head-to-head online gaming (with chat) and a Home Banking Product (both were for Mega Drive). Then in 1998 we reached 1,000 software (products) published! Today we are still the number one Brazilian videogame manufacturer carrying Sega products."

We then asked Arnhold why he feels they have been so successful. He smiles, reflecting on the past, before explaining that a lot was due to genuinely caring about customers. "Maybe the reason for our success was based on low cost, high quality, locally manufactured products, plus aggressive marketing and a good knowledge of our end consumer. We did not only sell them a product, we invited them to join Sega Club where they enjoyed a sense of participating in a community, received special promotions (discounts for everything from movie tickets to Formula 1 Grand Prix seats)."

Beyond this they also took part in several industry firsts, including ventures that had otherwise been limited to Japan, and developed several world exclusives. "We had an excellent hotline for tips and hints, and even started to take [consoles] online before the internet really went commercial. We developed games with local characters, we localised RPG games and always maintained the life of a console, even after Sega dropped them. Master System received most Game Gear exclusives, as well as new developments such as *Street Fighter*."

"IN 1996 WE REACHED THE MARK OF 2MM CONSOLES; OUR HOTLINE WAS RECEIVING 50 THOUSAND CALLS A MONTH" STEFAN ARNHOLD

We then challenged him, asking if Tec Toy had ever considered acquiring a licence from, for example, Nintendo. But he was resolute in his answer, "No, we were always faithful to Sega." This is true since while Sega left the hardware market years ago, it's still viable in Brazil and Tec Toy continues to manufacture Sega systems. Best of all, they contain plenty of high-quality built-in games. As seen online they still market the Master System 3, with 120 games installed, including four *Alex Kidd* games, *Baku Baku Animal*, three *Fantasy Zone* games, *Penguin Land*, *Rainbow Islands* and too many other classics to list. Complementing this is its Mega Drive 3 with 71 installed games, again featuring a healthy selection of favourites (making the UK's Radica pads look rather pathetic). Sadly, Tec Toy has ceased manufacturing new cartridges for systems and development of post-Mega Drive machines has also stopped.

Much of Tec Toy's success has come from being partnered with Sega when they were hardware manufacturers and so we asked, what is the future of Tec Toy now that Sega is software only and no other company's hardware (Nintendo, Microsoft, Sony) has such an established stronghold? Mr Arnhold was defiant and answered with a sense of pride, confident they would continue to succeed and hinting at great things to come. "Our main business today is the manufacturing of DVD products (Hardware under Tec Toy brand and Karaoke software using VCD technology). The future will come with Sega again through mobile games."

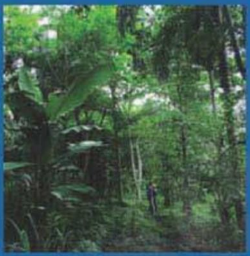
Tec Toy and the market they helped to create are a fascinating alternative to what we have in Japan and the West. While acquiring their wares is not an easy task and the hardware won't work on non-Brazilian TVs, head over to **www.tectoy.com.br** to see what's available to our Portuguese-speaking cousins.

Special thanks to the president of Tec Toy, Stefano Arnhold, for answering questions and kindly donating photos. Thanks also to **www.consolemad.co.uk** for providing the Zillion laser-tag photo, and Luiz Bonaccorsi of **www.gamesbrazil.com** for aiding with research and imagery.


» *Woody Woodpecker Vacations* for the Mega Drive.

PERMACULTURE

To honour Tec Toy's founder, who sadly passed away, the permaculture-based "Daniel Dazcal Foundation" was formed. The term "permaculture" was created by two Australians in the Seventies, meaning a system of sustainable habitats and food production designed around nature. As the website explains, "The target of the Foundation that carries his name is to spread Permaculture techniques in order to teach poor populations to produce their own food to live through ecologically correct and economically viable methods. The broadcasting of those techniques will certainly have a huge impact on the future of those populations, in the same way as Mr Dazcal's short life had an impact on all of us." The fact that a videogame company like Tec Toy would be involved in such work, shows how honourable those in charge are. See http://www.fdd.org.br/ for more information.

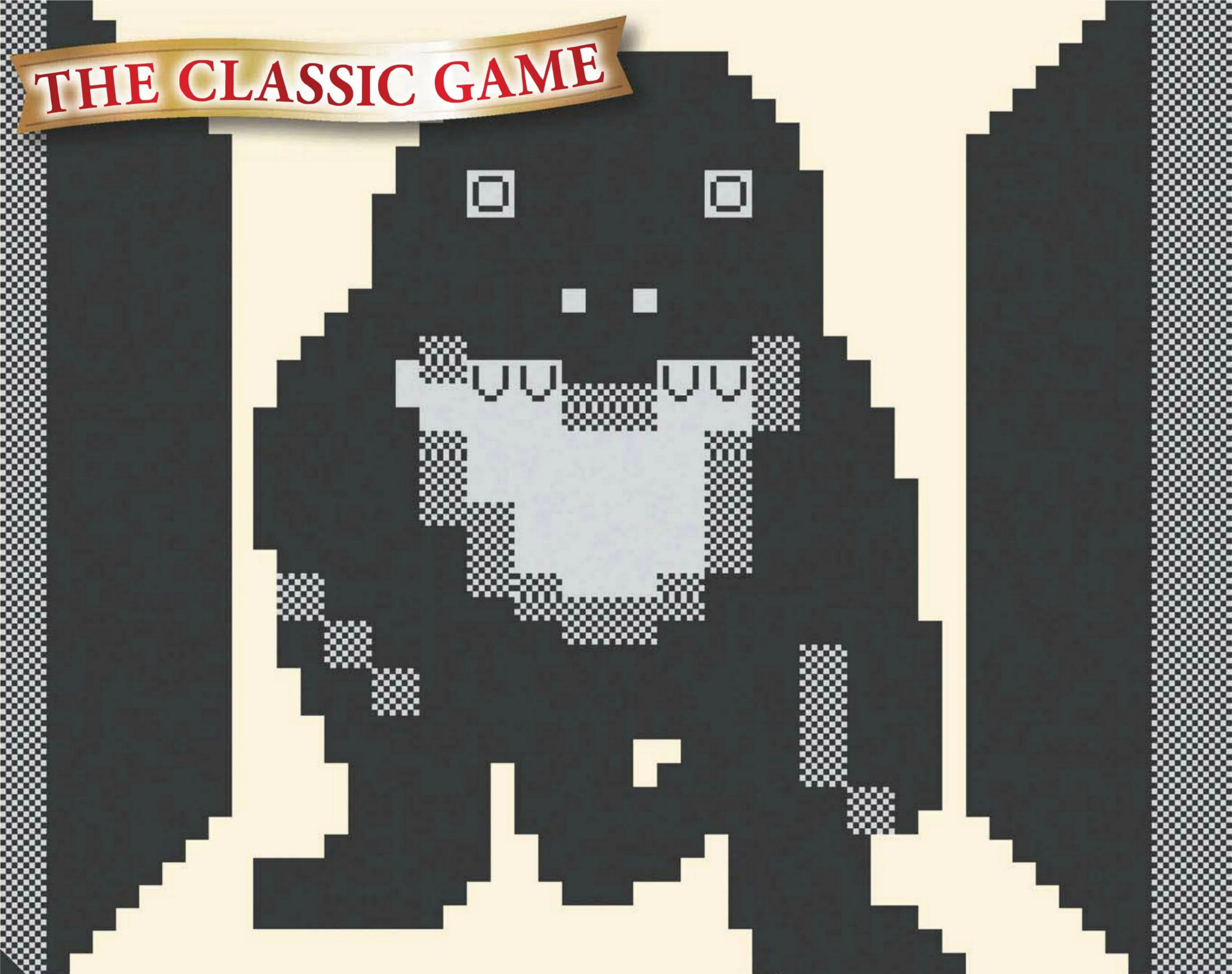



» *Nightmare Circus* on the Mega Drive wasn't developed by Tec Toy, but they were the only ones to publish it.

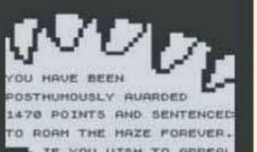
FINEST HOUR

Succeeding against the odds

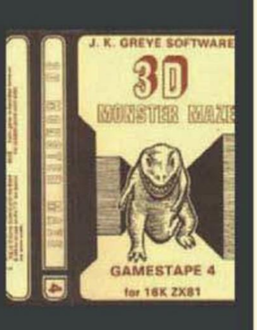
There is no single thing that can be called Tec Toy's finest hour, rather it is the fact they succeeded so magnificently when others were failing. They legitimised South American gaming, set precedents, created a lasting legacy and brought officially licensed products to the masses. A company for Brazil to be proud of.



IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** J. K. GREYE SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** MALCOLM EVANS
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SURVIVAL HORROR
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** 50P



3D MONSTER MAZE

Trapped, unarmed, entirely deaf and being tracked by one of pre-history's most terrifying reptiles. This is what was experienced by lucky ZX81 owners in 1982. John Szczepaniak re-enters the 3D Monster Maze and grapples with one of England's most famous Dynamosaurus Imperiosus.

Clive Sinclair's ZX81 is almost synonymous with Malcolm Evans' 3D *Monster Maze* (*MM*). Whenever the humble 16k micro is spoken of, *MM* is fondly described and listed as one of, if not the best game released for it. Whenever anyone decides to emulate the silent duotone beast that is the ZX81, *MM* is inevitably the first game tested (it's often actually bundled with said emulators), and once other high-quality titles have been played, *MM* is normally what people return to. It is also, nearly 25 years later, one of the few titles available for the system which still manages to impress.

The premise is simple: you are placed in a massive maze viewed from a first-person perspective. Everything is silent, but you know that somewhere within the maze there is a Tyrannosaurus Rex desperate to hunt you down and render marrow from bone. As the intro explicitly states, "The management advise that this is not a game for those of a nervous disposition." There is also an exit and using only three buttons (5 turns left, 7 is forward, 8 turns right) you must navigate the maze, avoid the titular monster and somehow make it out of there alive. After which you get to do it all again, in an entirely new (and randomly generated) maze. Points are gained only for each step taken while the T-Rex is actively hunting you, meaning to score highly you need to get as close to the danger as possible. It's a subtle design element that forces not only greater exploration but also risk-taking, like a proverbial moth repeatedly plunging ever closer to the enticing naked candle flame.

All this may seem incredibly simple and uninteresting today, but this is a blasé attitude to take. Back in the early

THEY SAID:

““IF I HAD TO CHOOSE JUST ONE PROGRAM TO IMPRESS AN AUDIENCE WITH THE CAPABILITIES OF THE ZX81, THEN 3D MONSTER MAZE WOULD BE THE ONE WITHOUT A DOUBT”

ZX COMPUTING DECEMBER 1983



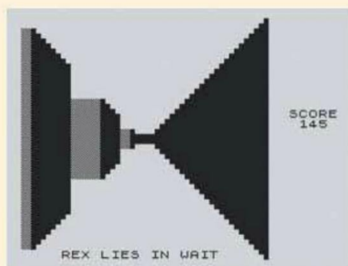
Eighties, as the nation’s children watched *DangerMouse* and ate sugar-saturated breakfast cereal, *3D Monster Maze* was all about terrifying atmosphere and desperation. A complete lack of audio added to this, since without being able to actually hear approaching footsteps the player had to read status updates that were constantly displayed on the screen. It was a corrosive silence, which made the inevitable encounter with a gaping maw of dagger-sharp teeth all the more terrifying when it finally happened. Even the developer, Malcolm Evans, has attested to being frightened by his own creation. Trying to find the exit becomes a frantic race around blind corners, and the tension constantly increases because you fully understand that with each step that doesn’t bring about your exodus, your foe is likely to get one step closer. You can actually run faster than Mr Rex, which in theory makes things easy (certainly it never feels unfair), but lack of concentration and panic normally leads to an impromptu and sudden face-to-face meeting with the dreaded reptilian foe.

The graphics (built from a series of 8 x 8px characters resembling ASCII) might be incredibly blocky to those used to today’s high-definition era, but there is a distinct swagger in the dinosaur’s movements as his black arms hypnotically sway from side to side. Look about these two pages and you can feel the charm oozing from the minimalist designs; squint and you can even almost see a bottle of Brown Sauce in his breast pocket, ready for the ensuing meal. Almost.

To fully understand and appreciate *MM*, both what it is and what it achieved, you need to have sampled other games available for the ZX81. After sitting down and loading from audio cassette tape ten (randomly selected) games, and then finally loading *MM*, an epiphany should occur, which enlightens you as to how revolutionary it was for that era. Only in the arcades could one have been able to experience anything more advanced; for home use, those low-resolution mazes of impending death were the vanguard of gaming exhilaration.

It was also one of the very earliest first-person shooters ever devised for home usage (this is debated, with *Dungeons Of Daggorath* also vying for position). Quite a prestigious accolade to hold, though it comes with a few caveats. There are no actual guns in *MM*, or any weapons for that matter, so the “shooter” statement is a bit of a misnomer. Some prefer to call it a first-person adventure, but the fact remains that it was the original home-based corridor crawler years before *Wolfenstein 3D*. John Carmack would only have been around 12 years old at the time of its release, though in all likelihood he never saw and therefore was never influenced by *MM*.

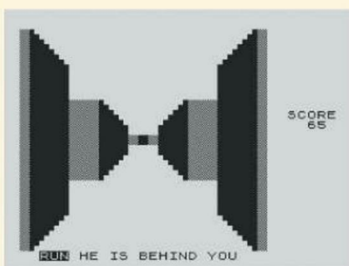
Even today it is still enjoyable, far more so than one would think it should be! Games that allow scoring will always draw people and, being so accessible and intuitive to control, its basic (almost puzzle like) mechanics allow for quick bouts of tactile play. In a way it’s almost comparable to *Tetris* since, apart from working so incredibly well without colour, it is *Monster Maze*’s highly refined pick up-and-play simplicity that has allowed it to endure better than most other games of the era. There are no problems with collision detection being imprecise or the controls requiring adaptation; there are no rough edges to distract you. Once it’s loaded you’re away and even after dying, a quick tap of the C button puts you right back in the action. Granted it won’t keep you away from *Prey* for very long, but load it up on your old ZX81 (or emulate it), and you’ll instantly see why it’s a Classic Game.



» A brief moment of respite. Enjoy it, because such moments are scarce in that hellish maze.



» The story involves a circus and dinosaur preserved in silicon. Nothing unusual about an FPS with a throwaway plot, then.



» It’s no good running now, you’re already dead.



» It’s time to accept your particularly horrific fate.

SQUINT AND YOU CAN ALMOST SEE A BOTTLE OF BROWN SAUCE IN HIS BREAST POCKET, READY FOR THE ENSUING MEAL… ALMOST

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KNOT IN 3D
ZX SPECTRUM
(1983)

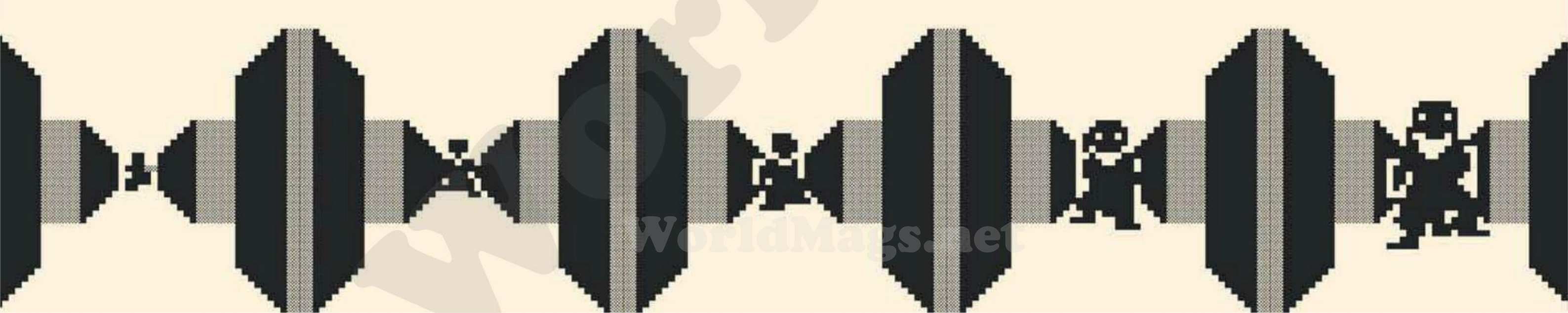
TRASHMAN
ZX SPECTRUM
(1984)

JONAH BARRINGTON’S SQUASH (PICTURED)
ZX SPECTRUM
(1985)



A highly ambitious Game Boy Color title inspired by *3D Monster Maze* was nearly released. Called *Tyrannosaurus Tex* and developed by Slitherine Software in the UK, it was completed in 2000 but ended up unreleased due to Eidos getting cold feet. It was previewed by several publications, many of which interviewed the developers, and the game was reported to be “smooth like *Wolfenstein 3D*”. It would have been a landmark release – there had been almost no other FPS titles developed for pre-GBA Game Boy hardware. In interviews Slitherine made mention of *3D Monster Maze* having an influence, though with *Tyrannosaurus Tex* featuring weapons it’s debatable how strong the connection would have been (though check out this screenshot). Assuming Slitherine are willing to talk and provide playable code, *Retro Gamer* will happily cover it in a future issue.

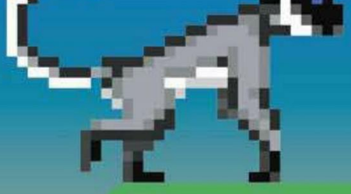






THE MAKING OF…

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND



What do you get when you cross sword fighting with pirates, monkeys and a rubber chicken with a pulley in the middle? Kim Wild dons a pirate hat and eyepatch to chat with Ron Gilbert and Dave Grossman about their swashbuckling classic.



» The stump joke, although in the floppy versions, was removed from CD-ROM to prevent even more confusion.



» Ron Gilbert's love of movies shows through with the disclaimer above.



The Secret Of Monkey Island is one title that comes to mind as being one of the all-time classics of adventure gaming. Stuffed with logical puzzles, offbeat humour, sword fighting and some truly memorable characters, *Monkey Island* is a prime example of how to create an adventure that can stand the test of time.

It would be some time from Ron Gilbert's arrival at LucasFilm Games before *Monkey Island* would begin development. To begin with, Gilbert's main role was that of the humble conversion. "My first job in the industry was with a company called Human Engineered Software where I was doing C64 programming," remarks Gilbert. "They went bankrupt only a few months after I started. I spent about six months looking for a job and was about ready to go back to school when I got a call from someone at LucasFilm. They were looking for someone to convert the Atari games they were doing for the C64." Dave Grossman's entrance into the videogame industry would occur much later and was something that occurred entirely by accident. "I was a graduate school refugee looking for something to do that was interesting without being morally reprehensible. I wasn't specifically trying to get into computer games or anything, but when I saw the ad I thought "Ooh! Yeah!" All of a sudden I was glad I hadn't gotten any of the other jobs I'd interviewed for over the preceding six months."



» Only a red button could strike pure dread into the hearts of pirates everywhere. Either that or the gophers.

After the conversion had been completed, Ron Gilbert teamed up with Gary Winnick to create the first LucasFilm point-and-click title, *Maniac Mansion*. It would be this game that would see the creation of SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*) – the engine which has been used in every LucasFilm/Arts adventure to date. The idea for SCUMM was borne out of Gilbert's hatred of typing "I hated playing adventure games where I had to type everything in, and I hated playing the "second guess the parser" game, so I figure everything should be point-and-click". Dave Grossman explains: "The SCUMM point-and-click interface was developed as an answer to the parser, which was what most graphic adventures used in the Eighties. Parsers let you try more or less any action you can think of, but most of us felt they were just too frustrating and slow to use, and that the limited ability to RESPOND to an infinite choice of actions showed the cracks in the fantasy too plainly. We tinkered with the interface with each new game, trying to make it as easy to use as possible, while still giving the player the means to specify a reasonable range of actions."

Although the system is now wholly owned by LucasArts, Gilbert feels that the secret of its success is still down to the quality of the games. "I think SCUMM has been successful because we built good games with it. Without the good games (and the silly name), no one would remember a piece of technology."



» The underwater puzzle that is simple, but ingenious. Also the only place where Guybrush can die.

"WE WROTE THE SCRIPT AS WE WERE DOING THE PROGRAMMING. YOU COULD NOT DO THAT TODAY" RON GILBERT



» Guybrush realises the way to a woman's heart is not by chocolates but flattering her with his conversational skills.

"MY NAME IS GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD AND I WANT TO BE A MIGHTY PIRATE"

While Zak McKracken came along, Gilbert began to put together ideas for *Monkey Island*, but development was put on hold as LucasFilm assigned the team with making a game to tie in with the *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* movie. This proved to be incredibly beneficial, as many of the development lessons learned ensured that *Monkey Island* was a more coherent game. "I did *Monkey Island* after *Indy*, so there was a lot I learned from how the puzzles came together." explained Gilbert.

Once *Indy* had been completed, Gilbert was able to continue design on *Monkey Island*, which came from a "love of Pirates, mostly driven by the Disney ride, Pirates of the Caribbean. I also wanted to make a game that was kind of like fantasy, because it was popular, but I am not a huge fantasy fan. Pirates seemed like a good compromise." To begin with, the



» Stan – used-ship salesman, con man and all-round animated guy – shows his deep love for Arnie.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION
SYSTEMS: C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC
YEAR: 1989

DAY OF THE TENTACLE (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1993

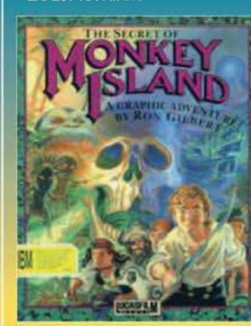
SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD
SYSTEMS: PC
YEAR: 1993



IN THE KNOW



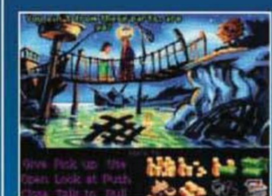
- **» PUBLISHER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
- **» DEVELOPER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
- **» RELEASED:** 1990
- **» GENRE:** ADVENTURE GAME
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



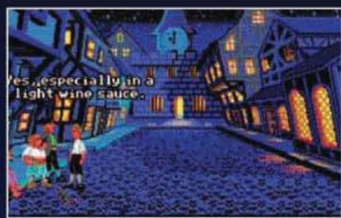
THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

LOOK BEHIND YOU: A THREE-HEADED MONKEY!

In 1991, a sequel was released in the form of *LeChuck's Revenge*, a game that expanded upon the original in every department. However, one area that has been particularly hard for fans to accept is the controversial cliffhanger ending, which Dave Grossman reflects "references *The Empire Strikes Back* rather heavily". Although follow-up title *Curse Of Monkey Island* did an admirable job of providing an explanation as to what happened to Guybrush and LeChuck, the fact that the game was developed by a different team means that many fans still hanker after the "real" *Monkey Island 3*. However, Ron Gilbert hopes that one day he will once again regain the rights to the series and finish the trilogy once and for all. "The secret will be revealed. If I get to make another *Monkey Island*, it will be called "Monkey Island 3a: The Secret Revealed or your Money Back."



"I GOT SICK OF PLAYING ADVENTURE GAMES WHERE YOU DIED WHEN YOU DID ANYTHING WRONG" RON GILBERT



» The original PC EGA version only used 16 colours, an incredible use of the limited technology.



» Bribery really is the key to becoming a mighty pirate. Failing that, violence solves everything.

main protagonist remained nameless and his humorous name came as a result of a graphics file. Steve Purcell, who worked as an animator, was using Dpaint to create the characters and saved the picture of our hero as a "guy". Selecting a file within the program calls it a "brush", so the picture would often be saved as guybrush and the name stuck. Threepwood was decided as a result of a company competition. General manager Steve Arnold really liked "Chuck" and had wanted a character with this name to feature in a game, so Threepwood's nemesis "LeChuck" was born.

Monkey Island's unique blocky style was down to hardware limitations rather than conscious design. The original PC version was comprised of 16 colours at 320 x 200 resolution, which meant that the design had to be simplistic. "If we had better hardware to do graphics, they would have looked better. But that lack of high-end graphics really causes you to focus on the game and story more," continues Gilbert.

"I CAN BREATHE UNDERWATER FOR TEN MINUTES!"

"I had most of the main puzzles done before we started," explains Gilbert. "I'd just start drawing boxes on a piece of paper, connecting all the "locks" and "keys". Once production started, Tim, Dave and I would hang out and brainstorm all the little pieces and fine-tune things that were not working." Grossman explains a little more about his role: "My job in the early days, on the *Monkey* games, was mostly about details – telling characters where to walk, writing scenes and dialogue for them, helping design strings of puzzles, and making sure the cliffs crumbled on cue while Ron Gilbert kept track of the big picture. It was like an apprenticeship (you know, no pay but you learn a lot), and after a couple of years Tim Schafer and I took charge of our own project, *Day Of The Tentacle*. We still did most of the writing, though, because we liked to."

One of the most memorable puzzles is that of insult sword fighting (see boxout). This once again came from Gilbert's love of movies. "I was inspired a lot by movies. I love movies and back then I would go to the theatre several times a week. When I am designing, I also spend a lot of time driving and listening to music. When designing *Money Island*, I watched a lot of old pirate movies, and they always spent more time in a sword fight talking to each other then actually fighting. So I figured that would be an interesting gameplay system. Also, if you're going to do a pirate game, there has to be sword fighting, but back then adventure gameplayers hated any action in their games, so doing this turned it into a (funny) puzzle."

What makes the puzzles more pleasurable is that the player can explore the game freely without death lurking around every corner. With *Monkey Island* (with the exception of depriving Guybrush of oxygen



» This love scene will only take place if you DON'T complete the other two trials first.



» FM Towns console had a port of the CD-ROM version (packshot courtesy of **http://lucasarts.vintagegaming.org**).





"IT WAS LIKE AN APPRENTICESHIP (YOU KNOW, NO PAY BUT YOU LEARN A LOT)"
DAVE GROSSMAN



» Guybrush is horrified when he encounters the scariest beast to roam the earth since the dinosaur.

for more than ten minutes) it is impossible to die, placing the emphasis firmly on experimentation. "I got sick of playing (especially the Sierra) adventure games where you died any time you did anything wrong," explains Gilbert. "I felt like this was a cheap way out for the designer."

Inevitably there were elements that never made it into the final version. An amnesia plot for Guybrush Threepwood was dropped once his name was decided upon. Meathook initially gave the player three tasks before agreeing to join the crew for *Monkey Island*, but this was reduced to the funniest one as it was felt that there were too many for that section. Meanwhile, Herman Toothrot was added to make *Monkey Island* feel less uninhabited.

NEVER PAY MORE THAN 20 BUCKS FOR A COMPUTER GAME

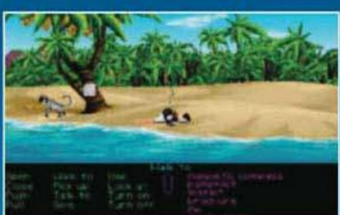
While the dialogue is entertaining, much of it was improvised as the game was developed. "We wrote the script as we were doing the programming. You could not do that today. You'd need to start with a script," comments Gilbert. "It was like snowboarding on a hill you haven't been down before. We couldn't see the bottom, but we knew where it was and had a basic plan for getting there. But the plan changed with each bump in the terrain," remarked Grossman. "A lot was either filled in or rethought as we went – the dialogue in particular, not a syllable of which had been written in advance."

Development for the sequel began almost immediately after the first and was critically acclaimed while also proving popular among the fan base. Unfortunately, Gilbert left before work could begin on the third game to complete the trilogy (see boxout). "I felt that I had grown to the point where I wanted to run my own company, so I started Humongous Entertainment and we made adventure and other games for kids." The third game, however, was well received by the *Monkey Island* programmers. "I don't know about the 3D version, I haven't played that one. I did play *Curse*, though, and I liked it. It was fun, and it felt *Monkey*ish," comments Grossman. Gilbert is equally positive, but speaks scathingly of the fourth outing. "I thought the writing was good and carried the tradition of the first two games. I did not like that Guybrush and Elaine got together. That wouldn't happen. I did not play *Escape From Monkey Island* for more than ten minutes. I could not get around the bad UI and character navigation."

Even today, the success of *Monkey Island* is unexpected. "Those were the first games I ever worked on, so I didn't have the slightest idea what to expect," remarked Grossman. "I don't remember thinking about it at all while we were building the first one – I was just enjoying making it fun and making it funny, and it didn't really occur to me that, after we were finished, we were actually going to send it to stores where it would be seen by the public."

These days, Ron Gilbert remains on the outskirts of the industry working on his own game ideas and entertaining us all with his personal blog Grumpy Gamer (**http://grumpygamer.com**). Dave Grossman now works with adventure company TellTale Games (**www.telltalegames.com**) who have just recently released the first episode for the new *Sam & Max* series, which comes highly recommended.

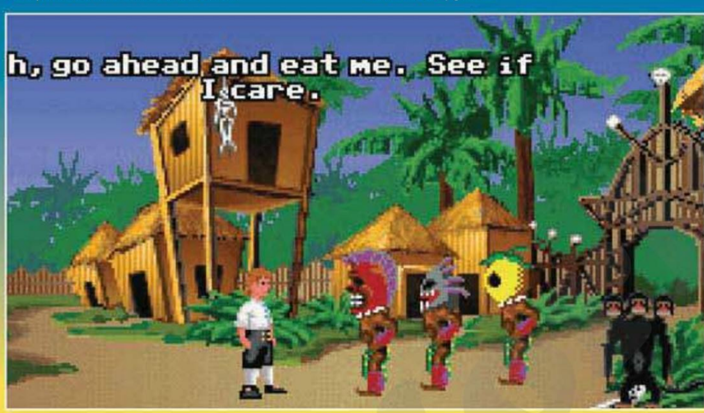
Of course, it wouldn't be a proper article without asking the immortal question: just what is the Secret of Monkey Island? While Ron Gilbert just laughs the question off, it's Dave Grossman's remark that fittingly ends this piece. "If I told you, the trained weevils would come for me."



» A cheeky monkey helps himself to some fruit while Threepwood lies unconscious on the beach.



» Monkey heads. Banana pickers. Just what the hell is going on in this crazy game?



» Look behind you, it's a three-headed monkey!



» This overhead map shows locations you have visited.

HOW APPROPRIATE, YOU FIGHT LIKE A COW

Sword-fighting insults is one of the most memorable aspects of the game. Here we have collated together some cutting remarks worthy of any mighty pirate.

I got this scar on my face during a mighty struggle!
I hope now you've learned to stop picking your nose.

Have you stopped wearing diapers yet?
Why, did you want to borrow one?

I have spoken with apes more polite than you.
I'm glad to hear you attended your family reunion.

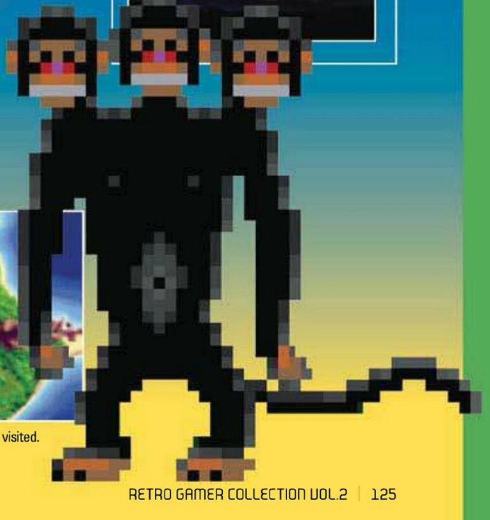
There are no words for how disgusting you are.
Yes there are. You just never learned them.

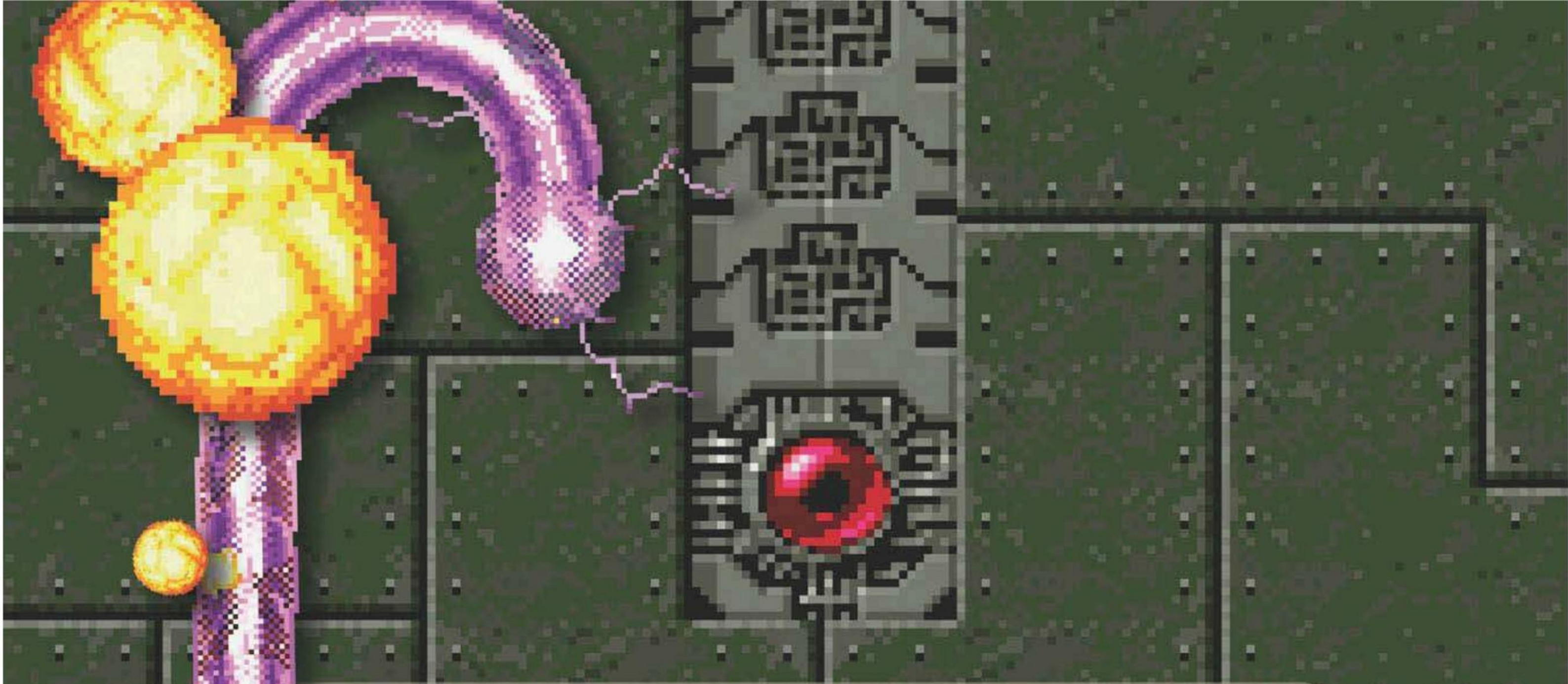
People fall at my feet when they see me coming.
Even BEFORE they smell your breath?

You're no match for my brains you poor fool.
I'd be in real trouble if you ever used them.

Soon you'll be wearing my sword like a shish kebab!
First you better stop waving it like a feather duster.







THE DEFINITIVE RAIDEN

STUART CAMPBELL BRINGS US YET ANOTHER IN HIS SERIES OF STUART CAMPBELL'S DEFINITIVE GUIDES TO THE GAMES THAT DEFINED THEIR GENRES. THIS MONTH, THE ULTIMATE TRUTH ABOUT RAIDEN. YOUR FAITHFUL REPORTER: STUART CAMPBELL

Regular readers of *Retro Gamer* will recall issue 24's definitive guide to the *Gradius* series of horizontal shooters, in which we untangled a mess of completely distinct games with confusingly similar titles. Here, however, we're going to sort through a different kind of muddle, centred around another famous shmup lineage – but this time, one that's largely comprised of what are ostensibly only two different games. Yet the plethora of releases bearing the name *Raiden* covers a range of games of such widely differing content, styles and qualities that they can barely be held to share the same DNA.

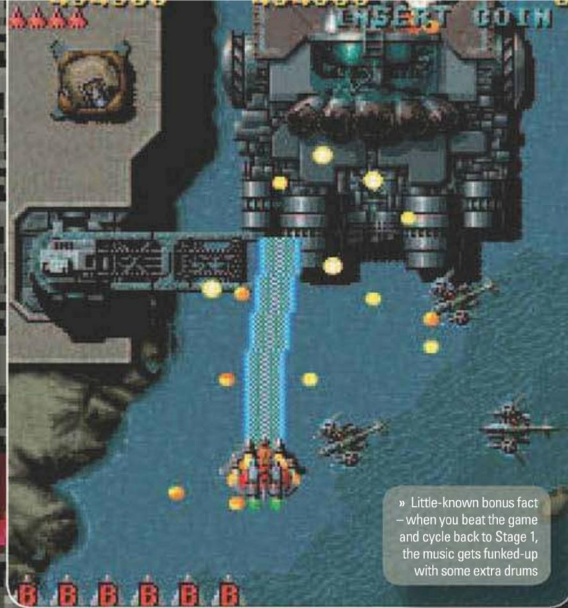
The first *Raiden* attracted no great attention when it made its 1990 arcade debut through little-known Japanese developer Seibu Kaihatsu. (Trivia fact: the original title on release was *Rai Den* – two words – meaning 'thunder' and 'lightning' in Japanese.) At first glance, it was just the latest in what at the time was a long line of shameless bandwagon-jumping rip-offs of Toaplan's 1987 smash-hit vertical scroller *Flying Shark*. But soon the game developed a popularity that belied its generic nature, and it spent over three years in the coin-op charts (more than two of them in the top 20). The key was probably the simple but clever armaments system, which bestowed the player's 'Raiden Mk.II' fighter with just two kinds of gun and two kinds of missile, but by making them switchable in play immediately gave the game lots more flexibility and depth than the average shooter of the era.

This simple dichotomy of attack tactics – between fierce, focused fire and wider-spreading, weaker weaponry – has been copied by countless clones ever since. Ironically, though, some of the clones have been truer to the spirit of *Raiden* than its own home conversions and supposed sequels have. Join us now for a *Stars In Their Eyes*-style odyssey through history, in which *Raiden* will be faithfully recreated, brutally butchered, thoughtfully enhanced, crudely mauled, respectfully honoured, cynically debased and finally – yay! – resurrected by a kind and loving Shmup God. Read on, gentle viewer, in the safe and certain knowledge of a happy ending.

1990
RAIDEN (ARCADE)

The original *Raiden* has a rather Spartan, gimmick-free nature, which probably contributed to its lasting appeal as much as the weapon system (and well-balanced difficulty) did – while it gets extremely frenetic by quite an early stage, the enemy attacks remain 'realistic' in nature, with none of the over-the-top screen-filling geometric 'bullet-hell' attacks that characterised many later shmups. There's nothing fancy going on here, just tanks'n'planes, battleships'n'bullets, stirring music'n'crunchy, solid sound effects – pure old-school, before old-school was 'retro'. (Indeed, the original *Raiden* is timeless enough to have been recently ported to UK-protocol mobile phones, although good luck getting anyone to sell you it.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: Raiden Project (PS1)



» Little-known bonus fact – when you beat the game and cycle back to Stage 1, the music gets funked-up with some extra drums

» In 'checkpoint' versions the power-up Fairy, if revealed and collected, returns at the start of your new life and drops some extra weapon pick-ups to get you started. Bless her



1991
RAIDEN DENSETSU (MEGA DRIVE/FM TOWNS)

The first home port of *Raiden* ('Densetsu' translates roughly as 'Legend'. The US title for *Densetsu* was the meaningless *Raiden Trad*) was a good solid conversion with the coin-op levels accurately recreated and almost all the enemies and secrets where they should be. The MD and FMT games are among many *Raiden* ports that return you to 'checkpoints' earlier in a stage when you die, whereas the coin-op (except for one variant released in Taiwan) simply carries on without interruption from the point where you got killed. You might argue that this is to prevent lazy players simply continuing all the way to the end on their first go, since at home you no longer have to put more money in. But since all the home ports restrict your number of credits anyway, it's a baffling and significant hike in the difficulty.

The version for obscure Japanese console/computer the FM Towns is basically arcade-perfect, but also features two unique Competition Modes, in which you're given just one life with which to either score the maximum points on Stage 1 only, or get as far as you can into the whole game.

The MD port suffers from a very drab palette, but its only real gameplay difference from the arcade is that the bosses (and some of the larger mid-level enemies) seem to have had several layers of extra armour-plating and are extremely tough even in Easy mode, taking twice the punishment of their coin-op counterparts. But if you think they're mean, you should see the MD game's real distinguishing feature: the Special Stage.

A bonus level after the normal game's credits have rolled, it's the most insanely, impossibly hard thing you'll ever play, and can only have been meant for people using a cheat cartridge like the Game Genie. If you finish it (and infinite smart bombs are the minimum requirement to have a chance), it announces '1991: *Heavy Nova*', which is another Mega Drive game by Micronet (coders of the MD *Raiden* port). You'd think it might be another shooter, from which the level had perhaps been borrowed, but it's actually a rather clunky side-scrolling beat-'em-up. Bizarre.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The Mega Drive emulator Fusion and the FM Towns emulator UNZ

1991 RAIDEN (PC ENGINE)

In the early Nineties the PC Engine was the hardcore gamer's shmup-platform of choice, and alongside the stellar conversions of *Gradius* and *R-Type*, this Hudson Soft-developed port of *Raiden* was one of the prime reasons. It's a superb piece of work, putting the basically 8-bit machine into overdrive to capture the essence of the coin-op perfectly, using the full screen (without the big ugly status bar that disfigures the MD version) and a rich, bright palette. It makes a very few subtle concessions (like different scenery under Stage 2's flyovers and the slightly altered behaviour of a couple of bosses), and it also features the 'checkpoint' system, but it gets rid of the over-armoured enemies and overall it plays even more accurately than *Densetsu*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The PCE/CD emulator Magic Engine (in the pretty 'TV Mode' for a more authentic aspect ratio)

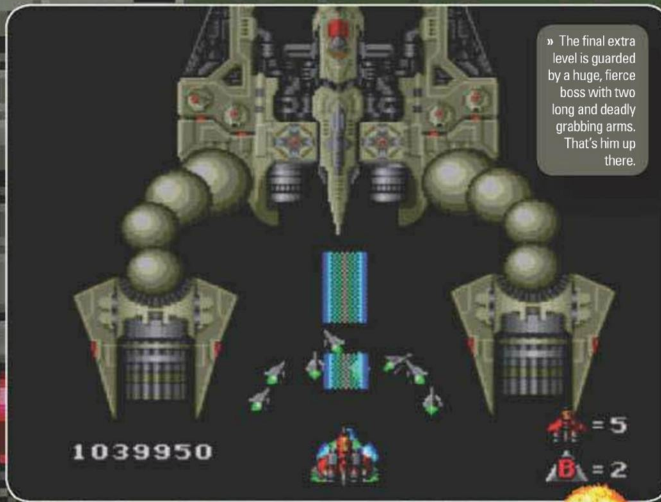
» As you can clearly see from these screenshots, the PCE version was also quite a bit faster than the Mega Drive one



1992
SUPER RAIDEN (PC ENGINE CD)

This enhanced version of the original PCE release, which gave the game a fantastic CD soundtrack in the classic Japanese-guitar-rock style, is one of the most celebrated *Raiden* games ever, and rightly so. (Other CD-based ports, like the PSOne's *Raiden Project* and the FM Towns *Raiden Densetsu*, also offer 'remixed' versions of the soundtrack, but they're both – particularly with the PSOne – far inferior to Super's.) As well as the splendid music, *Super Raiden* also added two all-new levels at the end of the normal eight – both of them maelstroms of frantic, unrelenting mayhem. The new stages (unrelated to the Mega Drive game's Special Stage) featured particularly superb wigout soundtracks, and in the unlikely event that you manage to see off the final boss, you're also treated to a brand-new end-sequence. Obviously lacks the PlayStation port's prettiness, but for our money this is the best *Raiden 1* you can play.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Magic Engine



» The final extra level is guarded by a huge, fierce boss with two long and deadly grabbing arms. That's him up there.

1992
RAIDEN TRAD (SNES)

And here, conversely, is the worst. These two *Raiden* ports, released barely three months apart, illustrate the point that alert readers will remember from the intro. They're allegedly both conversions of the same game, but *Super Raiden* and *Raiden Trad* have different stages, different layouts within the stages they share, different power-up progressions, different restart methods, enemies and items in different places, and generally could hardly be any more dissimilar to each other if they tried – and that goes double when it comes to quality. We'd need half the feature to list everything that's wrong with SNES *Raiden* – for example, almost every stage has had whole chunks crudely hacked out of it, culminating in the pale imitation of Stage 6, which is nearly all missing – but its one saving grace is that while the arcade, PC Engine and Mega Drive versions each take about 40 minutes to play all the way through, the butchered levels and absurdly easy difficulty level (despite your only being allowed a single continue, though in this version you don't get sent back to checkpoints) means the SNES one is over in barely half that time, and then you can smash it with a hammer. Really disgracefully bad.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Don't bother

1993
RAIDEN 2 (ARCADE/PC/PSONE)

With an unexpected hit on their hands, Seibu didn't want to take any chances when it came to messing up the formula they'd stumbled across, so when it was time for a sequel they produced a game that was even more generic than its parent. With an almost-identical setting (five stages of fortified coastal woodland, followed by three in space), one largely useless new type of smart bomb and just a single addition to the Raiden Mk.II's standard weaponry, *Raiden 2* was basically the same game again. An updated arcade version, *Raiden 2 New*, was released in 1996 to coincide with *Raiden Fighters*, with tweaked level order and new music. This music is almost certainly the 'New Release' soundtrack found in the PSOne version of *Raiden DX* but with *R2* still unemulated it's hard to be 100 per cent sure. That addition, though, marked the debut of one of the most popular weapons in the history of videogames. The purple Plasma Laser (or Toothpaste Laser as it was soon dubbed) locked onto a target, but could then bend and twist and loop around the screen like a lethal neon Slinky, zapping other enemies while still gripping on to its original victim. It was effective and spectacular, and while sneered at by some joyless 'hardcore' players, the Toothpaste Laser was so much fun to use that *Raiden 2* – despite otherwise totally lacking in invention – soon eclipsed even its mighty predecessor in popularity.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Raiden Project (PSOne)



» On SNES, your smart bomb detonates in the centre of the screen no matter where you actually drop it. That's how rubbish this port is



» The PSOne ports are arcade-perfect, except for inexplicably bad renditions of the music



» The mighty Toothpaste Laser in full effect in the awesomely fantastic *Raiden DX*

1994
RAIDEN DX (ARCADE, PLAYSTATION)

Lesser videogames magazines will tell you that *Raiden DX* (the coin-op was brought to the Japanese PS in 1997, which is the version we're going to talk about here since the arcade version isn't emulated and you'll never get to play it) is nothing but a slightly tweaked, essentially pointless revision of *Raiden 2*. These people know nothing. *Raiden DX* is the finest shmup of its generation, and while it does have a large chunk of *Raiden 2* within it (in the form of the five *R2* stages that make up Novice Mode), there's so much totally original content in *DX* that we've barely got room to touch on half of it.

The most inventive addition is the misleadingly-named 'Training Stage' – a rock-hard challenge which takes place across a single all-new level 15 minutes long, in which there are no 1-ups and no continues – but that's just a fraction of what's packed in here. There's the 'Special Stage' (an uncompromisingly ferocious all-boss battle played not for points but against the clock), Expert Mode (nine all-new stages, except with the bosses from *Raiden 2* and music from *Raiden 1* – practically a whole new *Raiden* game in itself), all sorts of impressive bonus material to unlock (galleries, perfect-game demonstration videos and the like), and to cap it all the basic game features a totally new scoring mechanism that completely changes the way you play. If you only ever buy one *Raiden* game, make it this one.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The PlayStation emulator ePSXe

1994
RAIDEN (JAGUAR/AMIGA/PC)

As the sequel reinforced the series' popularity, back in Blighty developers Imagitec made three reasonably competent versions of *Raiden* for some long-overdue UK releases, using largely the same code for each one. The three games are all quite different in execution, however. The DOS-only PC version occupies the full width of the screen, with only minimal scrolling, but offers the hapless player a choice between music OR sound effects. The Jag port manages both at once, but has a massive status bar taking up a third of the now-cramped screen. And the Amiga game (written for AGA machines only) employs a completely new and rather garish palette, and also reverts to having to choose between music or sound. The Amiga version was never published – apart from a one-level demo given away on a cover disc – but it was completed, and the author is currently trying to retrieve the source code from his archive tapes for public release.

The main characteristic/failing of all three Imagitec releases is that – like the coin-op but unlike all the other console ports – there's no rapid-fire option to save your joints from the pain of having to relentlessly pummel the fire button to get a semi-decent stream of shots, which is bad enough on an arcade cabinet, but sheer hell on a joypad.

PLAY THEM NOW ON: WinUAE for the Amiga demo, and the DOS emulator DOSBox for the PC version (which won't work on Windows PCs otherwise) – the Jaguar version is only currently supported by Virtual Jaguar, and not very well, so you'll need the real thing

» Weirdly, the Jaguar is actually still drawing the play area behind the status bar, as you see when it disappears at the end of a stage



1996
RAIDEN FIGHTERS (ARCADE)

Now things get a little strange. Originally developed as an unrelated game by the name of *Gun Dogs*, but after some brand-recognition test-marketing this rather standard issue shooter (in fact largely a rip-off of the *Strikers 1945* series from Psikyo, which debuted the previous year) was hurriedly adopted into the *Raiden* family. The good old Raiden Mk.II warplane (complete with Toothpaste Laser, but not the other two weapons) is now just one of seven fighters you can do battle in, each with a vastly different armoury of offensive capabilities (and a different order of tackling the five stages), and you can also attach up to two drone ships to your craft. It's a faster, more frenetic game than any of the previous *Raiden*s, and while it has cameo appearances from a few other icons of *Raiden* (like the hidden bonus point 'Miclus' and the power-up fairy), it really doesn't feel like part of the same series.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The arcade emulator MAME. None of the *Raiden Fighters* games has ever been ported to a home format. (An enhanced Xbox release, *Raiden Fighters Evolution*, was sadly canned early in the machine's life, as a Saturn conversion of *RF1* had been in 1997)



» Cunningly hiding in the trees, the Beast Wing unleashed its surprise missile attack with relative impunity

» This is the '2000' version of *RF2*, as you can tell by the appearance of the Raiden Mk.IIb



1997
RAIDEN (ATARI LYNX)

Not for the first time in this feature, we encounter a game called *Raiden* that purports to be a conversion of the arcade original, yet is so vastly different from it as to constitute a separate, passingly related game. Originally coded for the Lynx in 1994, this wasn't actually released until 1997 (by dead-format specialists Telegames) long after the handheld console had shuffled off this mortal coil. To make the sprites visible on the tiny display, the viewing area is extremely zoomed in, and your ship – which is the blue 'Mk.IIb' usually flown by Player Two, for some reason – has hardly any room to manoeuvre, making life extremely difficult. Taking pity, the game gives you a maximum-power pick-up almost straight away, at which point things get very easy until the end of the level, when you lose all your power-ups but get your totally ineffectual smart bombs restocked.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Lynx emulator Handy.

1997
RAIDEN FIGHTERS 2 (ARCADE)

After waiting three years between *Raiden* and *Raiden 2*, Seibu didn't waste any time in churning out sequels to *Raiden Fighters*. However, the original Japanese release of *RF2* rather curiously severed its only solid link to the lineage, by excluding the Mk.II from the choice of seven planes available at the start. A hastily revised US version put it back in, along with two additional fighters for a total of ten on the starting menu. Otherwise, the game's basically just a new set of levels for *RF1*. (For those of you not confused enough yet, three years later a China-only version with the ungainly name of *Raiden Fighters 2 2000* was released, featuring all 14 of the player craft from 1998's *Raiden Fighters Jet* (see the next page). As far as anyone can tell, it's otherwise the same as ordinary *RF2*.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME



» In the Lynx version, defying all known core *Raiden* principles, it's possible to use the laser and Vulcan-cannon weapons at the same time

1998
RAIDEN FIGHTERS JET (ARCADE)

Another year on, another *Raiden Fighters* sequel, but this one's gone a bit tonto. There are now a whopping 14 planes to choose from, including both the Mk.II and the Mk.IIb (which in *RFJ* comes armed with the original Vulcan spread cannon from *Raiden 1* and the scatter-bomb from *Raiden 2*). The game has a crazily convoluted level structure/scoring mechanism/plot, whereby almost the entire game takes place in a training environment ('VIRTUAL PRACTICE BY SIMURATER FROM NOW') and the missions are numbered incomprehensibly, starting with Mission 1, then Mission 5, and then in multiples of five in normal or backwards order depending on how you perform in each one (so your sequence could go 1, 5, 20, 40, 35, for example). Regardless of the numbering, though, there only seem to be ten actual different levels, and the game loops round them, not ending until you earn (via complex scoring objectives) and defeat the two well-hidden 'Real Battle' stages. Unusually for a coin-op, there's also an unlockable bonus mode, the Special Game, which is more or less a boss rush through short versions of all the stages in order.

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME



» In *Jet*, you can actually play as the 'Miclus' bonus-point dragon-pig thing, with the power-up Fairy (just visible here) acting as your drone fighter

2005
RAIDEN 3 (ARCADE/PS2/PC)

After a gap of 11 years from the last 'classic-style' *Raiden*, the original formula finally made a welcome return last year in the shape of the inaccurately titled *Raiden 3*. It's a wonderful game that takes the series right back to its roots (just one kind of ship, three primary weapons, three missile types) while also adding lots of excellent new features (like the mental 'Double' mode, where you play a two-player game on your own using the two analogue sticks on the PS2 joypad to control the two ships simultaneously, with the shoulder buttons taking care of shooting and bombing). Just as *Raiden DX* was the finest vertical shmup of the PSOne 1 generation, so *Raiden 3* is the best of this generation. Unusually and happily, it's due for a PAL release – on a budget label, no less – round about the time you're reading this, so check the review in **Retro Gamer** to make sure they haven't cocked up the translation with a 50Hz bordered version or something, and then get down to the shops. You won't regret it.

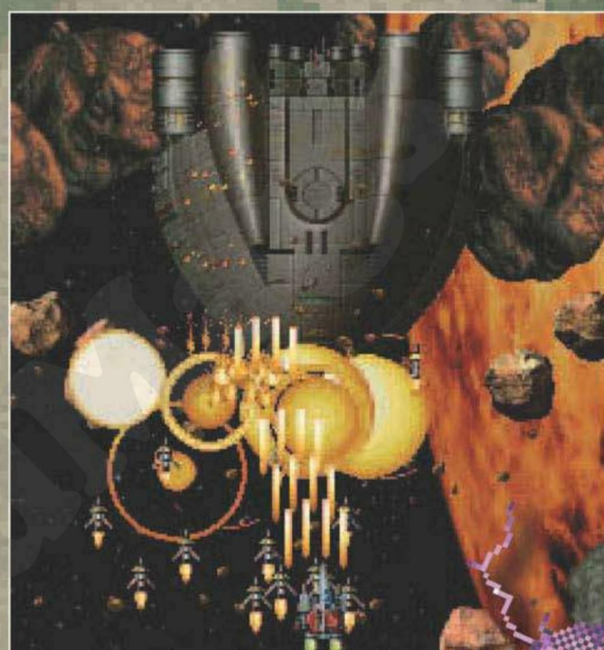
PLAY IT NOW ON: The PS2. There's also now a conversion for Windows PCs, released only in Japan in early 2006



» For all the *Raiden* fans out there, the majestic *Raiden 3* is like finally coming home.

I VIPE THE VINDOWS

Viewers confused by the very different styles of the 'normal' *Raiden* games and the *Raiden Fighters* titles might find themselves enlightened by a look at *Viper Phase 1*. Released by Seibu in 1995 (halfway between *Raiden 2* and *Raiden Fighters*), *VP1* was a coin-op shooter never converted to home formats that provides evidence of the missing link between the two branches of the *Raiden* family tree (if you'll forgive the mixed metaphor). An eight-stage shmup set solely in space (whereas the *Raiden Fighters* games are all on land, and the original *Raiden*s are a mixture of both), *VP1* puts you in the 'Judge Spear' ship that appears in *Raiden Fighters*, and much of the weaponry in the *RF* games is lifted directly from VP1. Perhaps the most telling connection, though, is that in *Raiden DX* on the PSOne you can unlock the *Viper* soundtrack as an extra, and have it playing during the game instead of the normal *Raiden* music.



JACK THE NIPPER

BEING A LITTLE SOD HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN



- **PUBLISHER** GREMLIN
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** MISCELLANEOUS
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



HISTORY

While I'm more than happy to play games that involve rescuing maidens, solving difficult puzzles and generally saving the world, sometimes I just want to be a little shit and create as much destruction as possible. It's unsurprising then that *Jack The Nipper* received plenty of screen time when I was but a wee nipper myself (alright… surly teenager…).

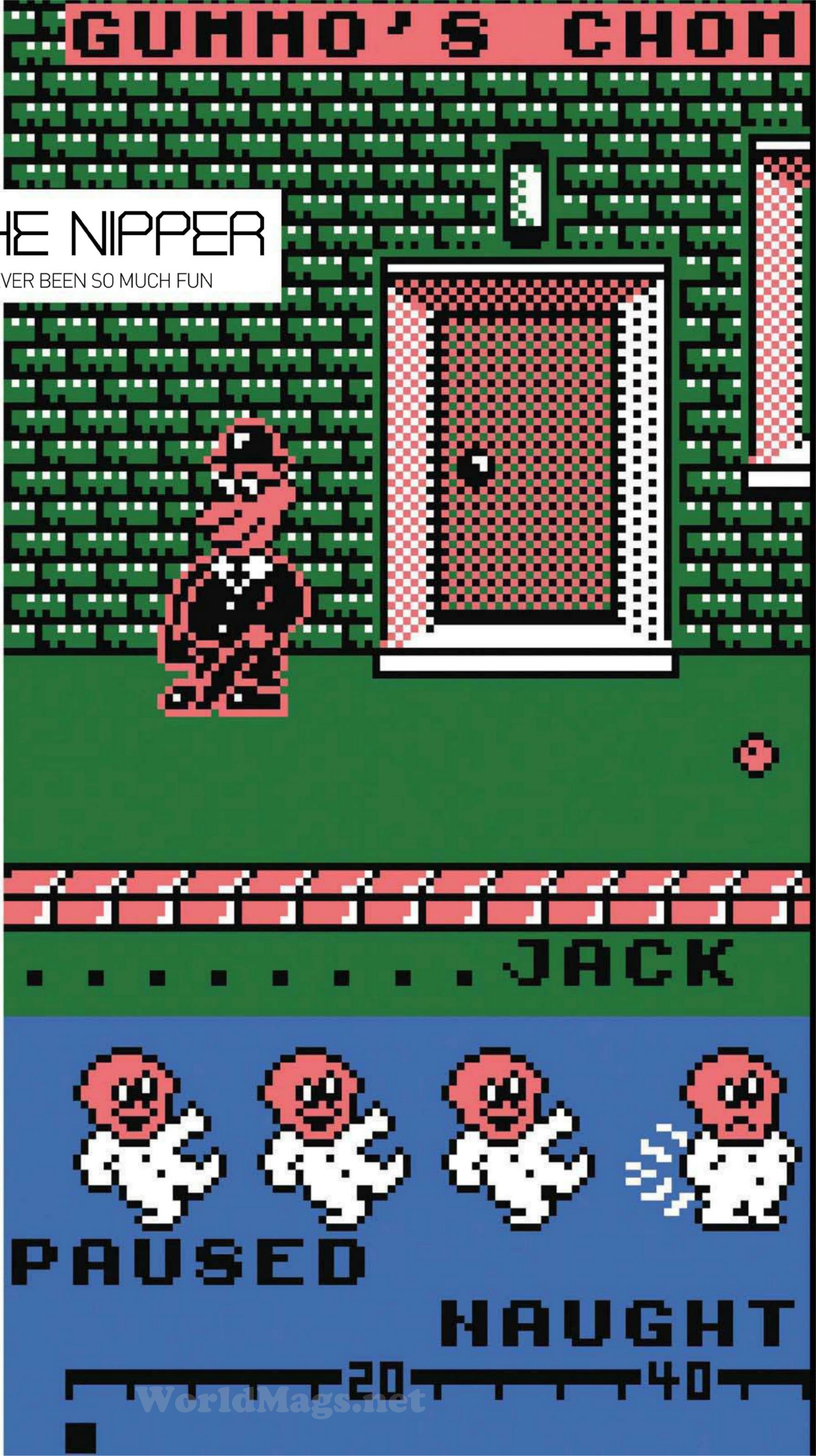
Sure, it was the sort of game that would have the *Daily Mail* in a fit of rage if it was released today (now there's an idea), but, hell, it was a lot of fun.

Starting off in the little tyke's bedroom, I'd immediately go after Jack's peashooter, located high on a shelf above him. Once armed, it was time to go out into Jack's neighbourhood and cause as much mayhem as possible, and that's where *Jack The Nipper* really came alive.

I love experimenting in games, and while Jack's antics weren't exactly taxing – they did cause you to think, if only to work out how to get the most out of each item you found. Creating mischief caused your naughtyometer to rise, and while simply dropping an item would cause it to raise a little, a bit of experimentation soon saw the bar rapidly increasing in length. Don't drop that pot of glue on the floor, take it to Gummo's Chomping Molars and use it to stick all the teeth together. Want to cause a blackout in the computer shop? Then use the battery to drain all the power.

Of course, all this unbridled naughtiness wasn't without its consequences… several characters patrolled each screen, and coming into contact with them caused your nappy rash to rise – you'd lose a life once it reached a certain level. While many were easy to dodge, causing acts of destruction, or hitting them with a random shot from your peashooter immediately made them home in on you.

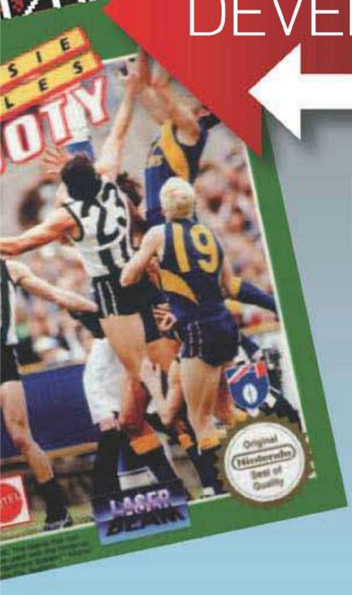
Despite this danger, I'd still shoot as many characters as possible. Maybe I liked the thrill of the chase, or, more likely, I was just a little sod…




PING MOLARS
GLEEM
THE NIPPER! ....
RASH
POCKET
YOMETER
1
2
60
80
100



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



MELBOURNE HOUSE (PART 2)

THE NINETIES WAS A GREAT PERIOD FOR BEAM SOFTWARE. WITH MELBOURNE HOUSE HAVING BEEN SOLD TO VIRGIN, BEAM GOT DOWN TO BUSINESS, KNOCKING OUT CLASSIC GAMES, PRIMARILY FOR CONSOLES. DAVID CROOKES CONCLUDES OUR TWO-PART LOOK AT THIS FAMOUS DEVELOPER

IN BRIEF

Beam Software reverse engineers the NES and its programmers write games for the console. Impressed, Nintendo hands Beam a developer licence. Beam boss Alfred Milgrom decides consoles are the future – even embracing the PowerGlove. Movie tie-ins and a host of original titles follow. Beam continues to leak cash and by the late-Nineties, Milgrom – having re-acquired the name Melbourne House – sells again, this time to Infogrames. A few changes later – including a takeover by Atari – and the firm becomes Krome Studios Melbourne.

The Eighties had been good for publisher Melbourne House. It had enjoyed its golden age, becoming drunk on the success of such fabled games as *The Hobbit*, *Lord Of The Rings* and *Way Of The Exploding Fist*. And in the minds of gamers, it had also cemented itself as one of the few brands you could really trust. Although Melbourne House and its developer subsidiary, Beam Software, were not as prolific as many of their rivals, their 'quality over quantity' mantra was appreciated by videogamers across the world.

Sales of Melbourne House's games had not so much rocketed as gone to the moon and continued to travel. With great reviews in the major computer magazines at the time, too, Melbourne and Beam could hardly put a foot wrong – in terms of producing games, that is. Financially, Melbourne House/Beam struggled in the late-Eighties, which is why the UK publishing arm and name were snapped up by budget house Mastertronic. A series of takeovers and mergers saw the firm become the Mastertronic Group, then Virgin Mastertronic, then Virgin Interactive Entertainment. What was becoming apparent through this series of changes, however, was that the Melbourne House name was being forgotten.

Fortunately, Beam Software, which did not form any part of these deals, was given the opportunity to thrive and as the company entered the Nineties, it continued to knock out some brilliant videogames. If the Eighties was Melbourne House's golden period – a time when the Commodore 64 and Spectrum owners would salivate at the mere mention of a forthcoming game from this Australian powerhouse – then the Nineties would prove to be the platinum era when the latest technologies were being pushed… sometimes to the limit.

It was a time of innovation and growth and boss Fred Milgrom was keen to look to the future. His programmers were too. "The halcyon days of Commodore 64 and Spectrum development



were over," says game designer Ian Malcolm. "We had to move on." Malcolm joined Beam in late-1989 just as it was working on games for the NES. Experts at Beam had been reverse engineering the console and were just beginning to create games for it. In particular, Beam was working on *Street Hassle* and Nintendo was so impressed it handed Beam a developer licence.

The company thus became only the second non-Japanese firm to develop games for the console and it was a defining moment for Beam, allowing it to continue to be at the forefront of games production. "Fred thought the NES was the next big thing," recalls programmer Andrew Davie. "Our reverse-engineering team had been working on the NES and they were using a game I was writing at the time, *Street Hassle*, as a sort of template for their tests. They had created their own version that looked like a sort of *Street Hassle* but was really just a hodgepodge hardwired testing environment. Anyway, when I finished *Street Hassle*, Fred said that he wanted me to do our first NES game. I was delighted. He told me: 'Take the version that the reverse-engineering team has been programming and finish it up. You have two weeks.'

I was appalled. The testbed was not suitable for conversion to a working program – it needed re-writing from scratch, though I wasn't given that opportunity. What's more, the prototype programming manuals that the engineers had created instructing us on how to program the NES were very basic. They had a few hints and tips on how to program the machine, but it was also full of 'don't know what this does.' I think, on and off, I was nine months into that project before it was put to bed. It was a miserable, miserable time in my career."

Yet the excitement of being a Nintendo developer caused Beam to grab any opportunity it could in relation to the NES. Among the decisions it made was to work with the PowerGlove, the ill-fated peripheral produced by Mattel in America and PAX in Japan. Released in 1989, this controller accessory for the NES was officially licensed by Nintendo. It recreated human hand movements on screen and, as well as having a D-pad on the forearm, it had a program button. This was used to program the numbered buttons – labelled 0 to 9 – into performing various functions.

Davie remembers: "Adam [Lancman, shareholder and joint managing director of Beam Group] called me to his office. He told me he had good news. Beam had sold *Bad Street Brawler* and it was going to be the first PowerGlove game. The deal was that Mattel had a new prototype device, the PowerGlove, and the company wanted a cheap game into which they could piggyback 'codes' for existing games. The idea was you would insert *BSB*, download the PowerGlove code for the game you wanted to play, and then put in the game you wanted to play and use PowerGlove gestures. Yet when I first saw the device, it was a golf glove with wires and a silver box, very homebrew-looking and unfortunately, when BSB finally made it out of the door, it was to 'worst ten NES games of all time' type reviews. And rightly so – it's probably the one program I've been involved with that I'd totally disown."

Still, attentions were turning to consoles in a big way. Starting with the NES, the company later branched into making games for the Game Boy and SNES. The 8-bit computers, the Spectrums and Commodore 64s, were becoming a distant memory. "The move to the NES brought in a new way of working," says Malcolm. "A 'licensed tie-in' mentality began to develop, but there were a number

FROM COMPUTERS TO CONSOLES

If the Eighties was the decade of the home computers, the Nineties was the era of the console, at least for Melbourne House/Beam. But how difficult was it to switch from home computers to consoles by Nintendo and Sega? Programmer Graeme Scott says: "It wasn't that hard. The biggest difference was in the type of media and the memory really – the NES had 2KB of memory while the SNES had 128KB. I would say the biggest change has been with the move to later consoles and the introduction of the 3D age. The 32-bit consoles had 2MB of memory and that helped immeasurably in enabling us to bring bigger and better games. These later consoles also brought an end to writing in assembly, at least for the entire project. By writing in C as we came to do, we were able to focus more on the game and less on the writing of the code. […] It's far easier to write in a high-level language such as C/C++; it lets you get the job done without having to worry about the low-level details of the machine."

"BEAM SOFTWARE BECAME ONLY THE SECOND NON-JAPANESE FIRM TO DEVELOP GAMES FOR THE NES – IT WAS A DEFINING MOMENT"



» *Mission Impossible* was one of Melbourne House's later games, appearing in 2003.

» A very special commemorative T-Shirt featuring all the games of Melbourne House.

» A selection of games and machines that featured in the Melbourne House Exhibition, which, conveniently, was held at Melbourne, Australia.

TESTING TIMES

To ensure Beam Software's games were of the best possible standard, they had to go through quality assurance. Ann Davie was a software tester for Beam, later becoming Q&A manager and then a producer. She joined in 1990, although she had worked with the firm when she was at American software publisher Mindscape. "There wasn't really a team of testers when I started, or anyone specifically dedicated to testing," she says. "Testing was mainly done by junior programmers and artists who were available to carry out testing as required. As Beam grew and the number of titles increased, the need for a dedicated group of testers became apparent. We were programming Nintendo titles and Nintendo's quality requirements were quite strict. There was no margin for error and we had to demonstrate that the games would work on all the various chips that had been produced. My team consisted of around four dedicated testers and around three or four other staff – programmers and artists – who would help out. We would videotape the gameplay, note tape positions of problems, produce reports with those references and pass them along to the producer, programmer or artist involved. It ensured our products would be of the highest standard possible."

of staff still there who'd retained an 'anything goes' mindset. I was fortunate enough to be able to gravitate toward that. My first project there, before I later became a designer, was as a storyboard artist on *Nightshade* for the NES, working primarily with lead designer Paul Kidd. He was not only very welcoming to a newbie but also the most fun person I've ever worked with, not to mention barking mad – in a good way."

Nightshade was a graphic adventure about a fledgling superhero setting out to free Metro City from the hands of evil Egyptian villain Sutekh. Told with hyperbolic narration, the game has slipped into relative obscurity since but this enjoyable curiosity, published by Ultra, showed Beam Software's ambition for the NES. The game wasn't released until 1992. Two other games Malcolm had worked on – *Back To The Future II/III* (1990) and *Star Wars* (1991) – came out first. It seems the film licences were taking precedence.

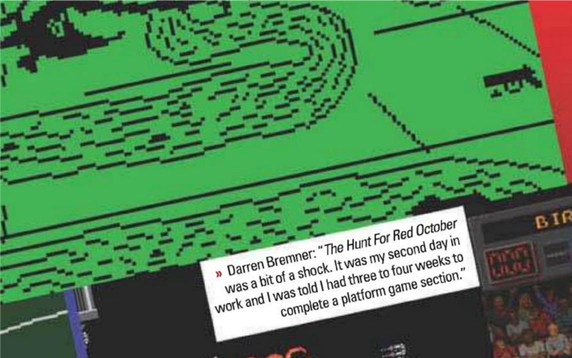
"The company was gradually moving toward a more professional set-up," says Malcolm. "Fred used to wear kaftans, proof of which I discovered in some old photos that turned up when we shifted offices. But he ditched them for the rather more imposing and businesslike black suit and bow tie. Development-wise, we were very much locked into the NES, primarily creating games for the US market rather than Australia or Europe. Yet while Beam was moving toward the slicker entity that it ultimately became, there was still evidence of the more casual beginnings to be found. Most of the desks were actually old wooden doors painted black and balanced on trestles and I had to share a PC with someone else for my first two or three months. The place felt like a rabbit warren built from a motley collection of mismatched partitions, there was almost always a loud mixtape playing in the art/design area where I lived at the time, and despite management efforts to rein them in, some people still seemed to work very odd hours."

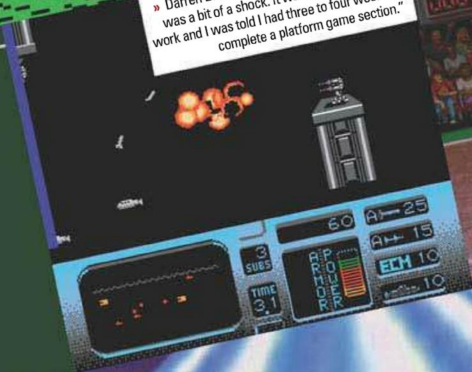
Although the market was noticeably shifting toward the United States, and the movie game tie-in continued to gain popularity (*The Hunt For Red October* was released in 1991), Beam Software still had a little bit of time to dedicate to those videogames that appealed to its home market. *Aussie Rules Footy* was released in 1991, for instance.

But still the big projects prevailed. "*Star Wars* was an interesting case," recalls Malcolm. "I remember being at a loose end one afternoon so I burned myself some ROMs of the current build of *Star Wars*, just to take a look at it, since I was interested but knew very little about it. There were some fairly obvious things I thought could possibly be improved, and I compiled a list of them. The next morning, I wound up talking to a couple of people about some of the issues. What I didn't know was that Fred had come in late that day, and was standing out of view behind me the whole time I was talking. I may have been a bit tactless in some of my comments, too, so when I finished I almost jumped out of my seat when his voice behind me said, 'Alright then, why don't you fix it?' Oops.

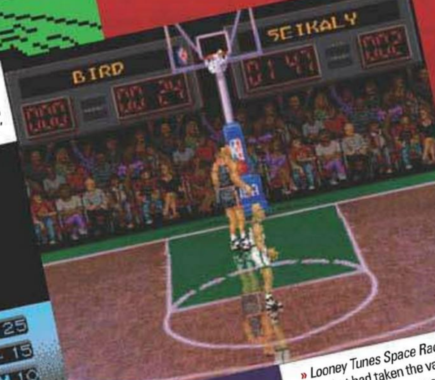
Part of the problem with *Star Wars*, at that point was that the project was effectively being worked on simultaneously in three different countries . Programming, level design and some graphics were being done in Melbourne; all the graphics for the top-down sections (the landspeeder desert stuff and Death Star attack) were being done by Lucasfilm Games – as they were then known – in California; and the three-dimensional first-person flight sections were being done by a Melbourne House person who was living in London at that point."

Malcolm rebuilt most of the existing levels from scratch and created further ones, then the team spent weeks altering jump heights, movement rates, air and surface friction and weapons firing rates to give the main controllable characters a distinctly different feel from one another. Lucasfilm then sent over several of its staff to help finish the game. "It wound up becoming something that I still think holds up quite well in comparison with its peers of the day," Malcolm says.





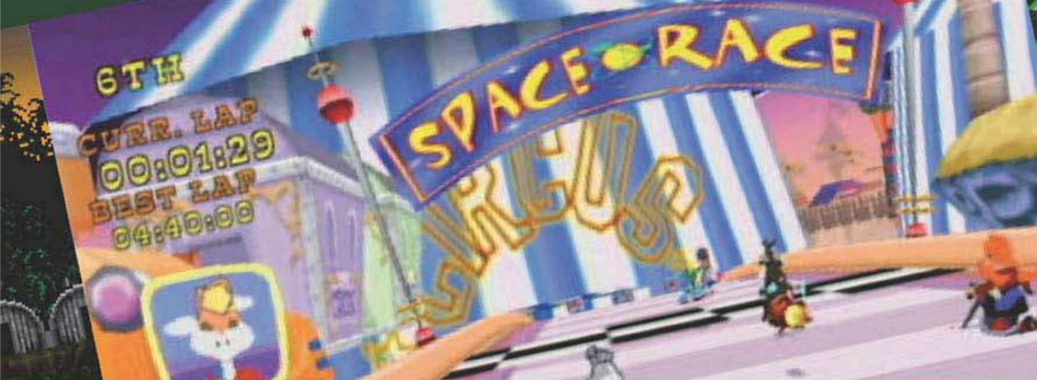
» Darren Bremner: "*The Hunt For Red October* was a bit of a shock. It was my second day in work and I was told I had three to four weeks to complete a platform game section."







» *Looney Tunes Space Race* was a flawed gem that had taken the vast majority of its development time to reach a point where it even remotely felt like a game, and then surprised its developers by actually turning out to be quite a good one.



» Infogrames' takeover of Melbourne House marked the beginning of the end for Fred Milgrom's involvement.

Marshall Parker, Beam's audio director and music composer, produced the soundtrack for the *Star Wars* game. "To be working with Lucasfilm was exciting, and trying to adapt John Williams' score to the NES was indeed a challenge," he admits. "I remember writing an adaptation of John Williams' Cantina music and mixing it with some original music of my own. The Lucasfilm producer told me it was the best piece of music he'd ever heard on a NES. I was very proud about that."

Marshall started at Beam part-time, working three afternoons each week and whipping up tunes using a word processor. He worked on a huge number of games, among them *Star Wars, T2, Nightshade, Shadowrun, Blades Of Vengeance, True Lies, Radical Rex, Itchy And Scratchy, Choplifter II, Bug,* and *Norse By Norse West.*

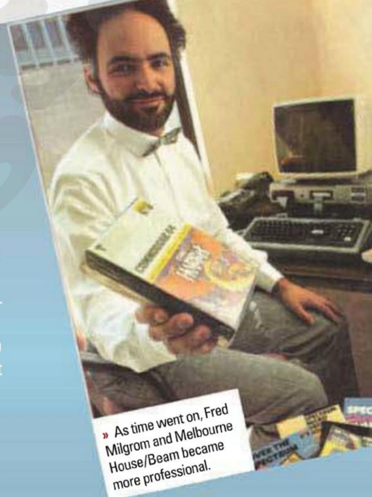
"At the time, I never realised that these would become landmark titles," adds Malcolm. "I look back now with fondness, realising that this was only the beginning of an industry that would explode into what it is today. Back then I was a freelance record producer, jingle writer and live musician. Making sounds and music for games on primitive equipment was just a bit of fun on the side."

The international relations being fostered by Beam Software was helping the company to produce bigger and better games and creativity continued to be encouraged. There were around 38 staff working on a whole multitude of projects with people doing something new, interesting or exciting at every turn. Yet most of it was for overseas markets and so Australians were hardly aware of what was going on.

"The game was king. Not schedules, not budgets, not timetables, not marketers, the game," says Darren Bremner, who joined Beam Software as a programmer in 1990. "We wrote them, played them and polished them, to hopefully produce something we could be proud of." Darren's first game was the movie tie-in that was *The Hunt For Red October*, for the NES. "Toward the end of the project, the publisher wanted an extra game added to the end of the side scroller shoot-'em-up sub-game," explains Bremner. "So it was my job to add a platform game section where you battled your way through the sub and disarmed bombs.

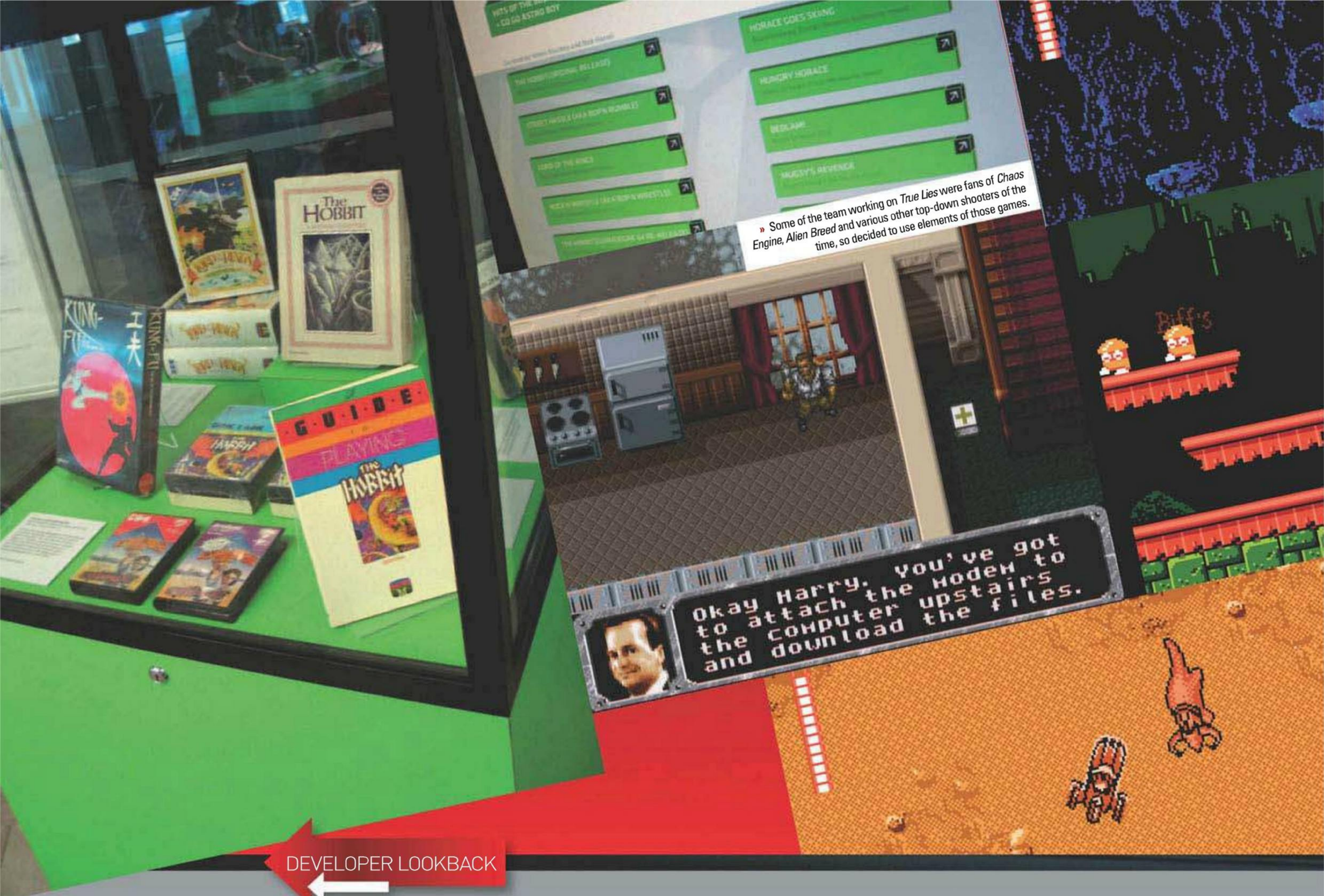
Bremner then went on to work on some of Beam Software's best early-Nineties games. He was lead programmer on *Shadowrun* and despite his background being a development manager for a business software house, his enthusiasm and love of computer games unleashed his creative side. That background did cause a few problems, though. "When I started at Beam," he begins, "I was given a desk, a computer, a NES development kit and manuals and I was told to play around on the NES for a couple of weeks and get the hang of it. I started with a simple game, *Pac-Man*, and I started to put it on the NES, drawing the artwork to learn the art tools. It was a good day. But then, after work, there were some drinks around one of the programmers flats. They asked me where I came from, how much I'd earned doing business software, so I told them. They were then very interested in what I was earning at Beam and I said I'd taken a substantial pay cut to work in games.

I was sure my salary was way less than theirs,' continues Bremner. "They were senior experienced programmers who had been writing games for years. During the interview I'd asked about



» As time went on, Fred Milgrom and Melbourne House/Beam became more professional.

"ALTHOUGH THE MARKET WAS SHIFTING TOWARD THE US, BEAM STILL HAD TIME FOR ITS HOME MARKET WITH AUSSIE RULES FOOTY"



» Some of the team working on *True Lies* were fans of *Chaos Engine*, *Alien Breed* and various other top-down shooters of the time, so decided to use elements of those games.

salaries and had been given example salaries for each level, so after a while I told the programmers what I was being paid. It was more than any of them. The pay figures I was given were bogus." Nevertheless, Bremner got stuck in and became an accepted member of the Beam dream team, later spending 100 to 120 hours each week for 14 months working on *Shadowrun* for the SNES.

Bremner laughs: "I had to work really hard since the game's production didn't start until almost a year after Beam had told the publisher it was underway. We were given one or two useless pages of design and then we all began to evolve it. For six months we worked until we were all too tired to work, went home, slept, got up and came to work again. We ate all of our meals – bar breakfast – at work in this weird, no-weekend life. And because of how we were working, days became 26 to 28 hours long. We'd sometimes be coming in at 5pm as others were leaving and going home the next day as they went to lunch. Management just left us to it. We were doing the work as quickly and as well as we could."

Shadowrun was a dark game, a departure from the usual 'light' offerings of other Nintendo titles. The player assumed the role of courier Jake Armitage who is almost killed by a gunman in Seattle in 2050. He wakes up, with amnesia, in a morgue and so begins the classic action role-playing game which is more of a PC title than one for the console market. By killing enemies or beating bosses, Jake built up karma that gave him different attributes, skills and magical powers and it all combined to produce a critically acclaimed game.

Titles such as *Shadowrun* were being created alongside big hitters such as *True Lies*, a licence of the movie that starred Arnold Schwarzenegger. The pressures of having to get a licence just right, however, meant more resources were often ploughed into them. With *True Lies*, Milgrom and Lancman splashed out, approaching the title rather differently from their other games. The key team members were sent to stay in a luxury hotel for two days to allow them to 'thrash out the basics of the game' without any senior management influence.

Rather than make *True Lies* another side-scrolling run-and-gun type platformer, the team decided to mix elements of *Chaos Engine*, *Alien Breed* and various other top-down shooters of the time and then add their own additional features into the mix. Beam's management loved the result and it was delivered pretty much on time. And, hey, it played well too.

More frivolous games like *Radical Rex* were then produced: "I still have mental scars from that game," reveals Malcolm. "Rex is a dinosaur. Who breathes fire. And rides a skateboard [Sighs]." Sequels to earlier titles were also knocked out.

Programmer Graeme Scott says: "I was proud to work on *Choplifter III* that came out in 1994. It was the first game where I was the lead programmer, and working on a game that I used to play to death as a kid on the Commodore 64 was a real thrill."

In 1996, Beam Software became the first publicly listed videogames company on the Australian Stock Exchange. At the time, Beam's directors had also realised that the Melbourne House brand had been allowed to lapse by Virgin so they re-registered it and launched it as its publishing/game development subsidiary.

A few sporting titles – the likes of *Cricket 96* and *NBA Full Court Press* – were produced for the PC, and then the developer began to work on the *Krush Kill 'N' Destroy* games. Justin Halliday, a producer at Melbourne House, worked on *KKND: Infiltrator*. "It is best described as an action driving game, with the player taking the role of a dirt bike scout who must undertake a series of dangerous missions," concludes Halliday. "It was relatively successful in the crowded real-time strategy market."

Such success could not turn around Beam Software's debt, however, and by 1999 the company was $12 million in the red. Alfred Milgrom and Adam Lancman were looking for a buyer for

BRAINSTORMING

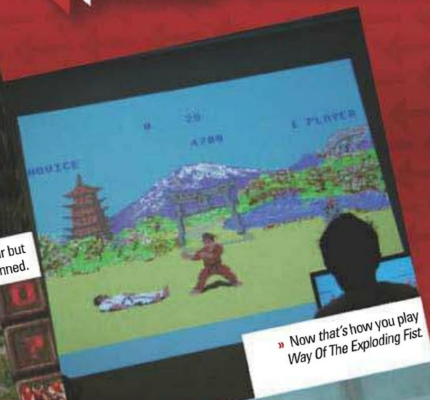
Not all of the ideas conjured up at Beam Software made the cut. Game ideas were left to the programmers, and people like Paul Kidd spent years writing game designs that were promptly filed away and forgotten.

Sometimes programmers would get to see a preview screening or a script of a movie before release, then go and brainstorm a game from that. The design sessions involved the programmers, possibly Fred Milgrom, the artists and whoever happened to be around. "I remember the sessions for the people and the occasional zany moments, not for the company itself," says Andrew Davie, "and probably the freedom that we all had contributed to it, but I think it was just that period where it was possible for the bedroom programmer to actually make something that would succeed on the world market. They were exciting times."



» *Shadowrun* programmer Darren Bremner went on to produce the acclaimed *Transformers*, creating a lot of the eye candy, grass, snow, snow drifts, trees, parts of the ocean. "It turned into a very nice looking game."

» *KKND* and *KKND2: Krossfire* were popular but sequel *KKND: Infiltrator* was later canned.



» Now *that's* how you play *Way Of The Exploding Fist*.



» The impressive Platinum Cassette Award that was presented to Alfred Milgrom.

Melbourne House – and that's when Infogrames stepped forward. The French videogame publisher was brimming over with spare cash from the success of *V-Rally* on the PlayStation and found itself looking for more acquisitions, having already snapped up Manchester-based Ocean Software that had published some of Beam's games in the Nineties, a few years earlier.

Halliday recalls: "Around this time the company was close to its peak staffing, of about 120 people, and there were three teams working on separate titles, *KKND: Infiltrator, Biotech*, and *Dethkarz 2*. Additionally, there were a number of other areas being worked on, like the Smarty Pants educational titles, Famous facial motion capture, and the Hotgames website. But after being publicly listed a few years earlier, it was fairly clear that the games we released weren't huge hits. The staff were spread across too many projects, and the company was struggling. There was a lot of uncertainty. We went from having three projects running to having them all cancelled, but with nothing concrete to replace them.

Infiltrator was cancelled and became *Mad Max*. Then *Biotech* was re-imagined before being cancelled. *Dethkarz 2* was also canned. Personally, the chance to work on *Mad Max* was much more interesting than *Infiltrator*, and *Biotech* had been in development for a while so its cancellation wasn't unwarranted. But the uncertainty continued until we got working on *Le Mans* and *Looney Tunes: Space Race*, for the Dreamcast."

In 2001, Milgrom left Melbourne House and formed Blaze, taking with him the non-game technologies Smarty Pants, Famous and Hotgames. He continues to run Smarty Pants to this day. This left Adam Lancman as the chief executive officer of Infogrames Melbourne House, the new name for the company, but he too left shortly afterwards.

"It was almost business as usual," remembers Halliday. "But we did have a number of visits, one from boss Bruno Bonnell, and another from a finance guy. The finance guy was a renowned toe-cutter, who told us that Infogrames was looking for new ways to sell games, including possibly through shoe shops."

Over the last few years, there have been more changes. Infogrames adopted the Atari brand in 2003 and Infogrames Melbourne House became Atari Melbourne House. Then, in 2006, Atari boss Bruno Bonnell declared that Atari Melbourne House was up for sale. In the November of that same year, Krome Studios made the announcement that it had acquired the firm – hence it now being known as Krome Studios Melbourne.

"It's an amazing time for us right now and we couldn't be happier to welcome this new team to the Krome family," says Robert Walsh, chief executive officer and co-founder of Krome Studios. "Acquiring the Melbourne House studio will allow us to continue to expand our company with additional seasoned talent to help further grow our business and position ourselves as a leading developer working on both current and next-generation titles."

While that brings us up to date, Melbourne House in its current guise now looks set to write the next chapter of a book that is already brimming with memories and great games.

"To some degree, there was a pioneering spirit at Melbourne House," concludes Ian Malcolm. "There were a lot of people with a real passion to create, to make something really worthwhile – games that they wanted to play for themselves and also share with others. But like so many companies, it was the people that could make it both the best – and worst – place to be. And I think the legacy was a host of great games."

Special thanks to Thuyen Nguyen, and also Gabriel McGrath who supplied us with several images from his visit to the Melbourne House Exhibition.

"BEAM WAS THE FIRST PUBLICLY LISTED GAMES COMPANY ON THE AUSTRALIAN STOCK EXCHANGE"

AND THERE WAS YOU THINKING RADIANT SILVERGUN WAS THE BEST EVER SATURN SHOOTER…

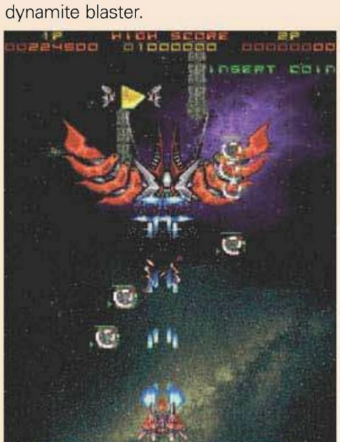
SOUKYUGURENTAI

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** 8ING/RAIZING
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SATURN
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £30
- » **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:**

Galactic Attack
It can be quite hard to track down now, but if you can find it then *Galactic Attack* is a worthy addition to your collection. Known as *Layer Section* in Japan (and *Rayforce* in Japanese arcades) *Galactic Attack* features a similar lock-on system to *Soukyugurentai* and is another dynamite blaster.





Interesting fact
Electronic Arts is the last company you'd think of when naming publishers of hardcore shooters, but that's exactly what happened in the mid-Nineties. As well as publishing the stupendously good *Soukyugurentai*, the American giant also looked after the brilliant *Battle Garegga*.

It may not be the most well known shoot-'em-up available for the Sega Saturn, thanks to a certain Treasure-developed title, but Soukyugurentai is undoubtedly one of the best. Sean Smith takes a closer look at this Nippon-only stunner…



» It will take some deft stick-work to avoid the giant clown, looming into view nose-first.

メガ駆動機構

The 32-bit era was a fantastic time if you were a) a fan of 2D shooters, or b) living in Japan or able to import. Yes – sadly us Westerners were too busy lapping up all of the glitzy 3D fare, meaning that, save for a handful of releases, our borders were nary troubled by the many beautiful creations from Japan – like *Soukyugurentai*. Translated into English as *Blue Heavens Red Lotus Team*, *Souky*, as it is affectionately known by fans, is undoubtedly one of the best reasons to own a Sega Saturn, and one of the finest vertically scrolling blasters of all time.

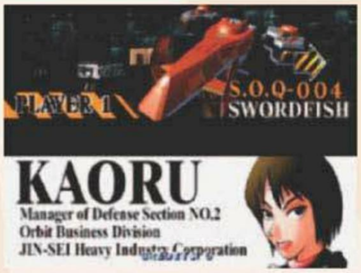
8ing/Raizing may be more famous these days for their *Naruto* tie-ins, but for seven glorious years from 1993, the *Toaplan*-offshoot mavericks delivered eight classic shmups. In 1996, following the acclaimed bullet hell of *Battle Garegga*, Raizing got to work using Sega's arcade hardware of the time – the S-TV Titan board, which incorporated a cartridge system and was virtually identical to the innards of a Saturn. *Soukyugurentai* was released initially in Japan but also received a very limited US release in arcade form, where the name was changed to *Terra Diver*. While a traditional vertical effort at heart, *Souky* features, much like Capcom's *Giga Wing*, a widescreen display – meaning that the entire playing area is used horizontally rather than flipping the monitor or TV screen for TATE mode. And oh boy, Raizing packed every inch of the screen with beautiful 3D-stroke-2D backgrounds, wonderful pre-rendered sprites



» Preparing to blast off and kick some ass!

GAMES FROM THE EAST THAT NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

N PROMISE



» Kaoru: back on the market after her divorce, lads – get in there!

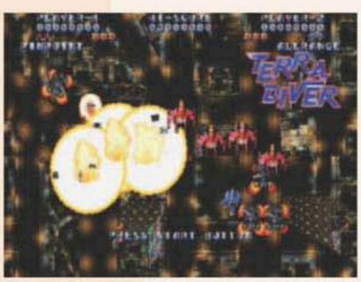


» Questionable piloting in the attract mode.

and incredible scrolling, scaling and rotation effects that create the perfect setting for the finely balanced gameplay on offer. The scenery takes in crumbling, post-apocalyptic cities, and journeys through the clouds and through space itself – each location looking completely ace.

Rather unusually, *Souky* dispenses with the standard 'humans vs aliens' premise, instead the shooty fun is set to the backdrop of a complex socio-economic confrontation between rival mega-corporations attempting to triumph over one another somewhere near Mars. You take control of the SOQ Red Lotus Team – a crack trio of pilots who include within their number, a middle manager going through a messy divorce, a moody young man with family issues, and a quarrelsome yet compassionate girl with tasty combat skills. Each pilot has access to a different ship, each with shmup-standard smart bombs, but different attributes in terms of speed and fire pattern. The red Toryu (Dragon) fires straight and diagonally in tandem. The Shien (Purple Lightning) has a spread gun and mini homing missiles, while the mean, green Houga (Fang) serves up heavy, concentrated fire and dual directional attacks. What ties them all together, though, is the NALS (Non-blind spot All range Laser System).

NALS plays a huge part in gameplay. Taking cues from predecessors such as Taito's *Raystorm/Rayforce*, holding down the main fire/attack button will send forth a lock-on laser-web. This is shaped as a cone or semi-circle depending on which ship you have selected – but regardless of shape, it will rather impressively destroy all the enemies it locks onto after the button is released. This gameplay mechanic creates a wonderful dilemma over whether you go all out and attack with your standard blaster, or play tactically to encompass as many baddies as possible in your fiery net of destruction. Each ship has a choice of two different lock-on weapons using this laser-web technique, enabling you to concentrate on one particular enemy or send out homing lasers or other such incendiary projectiles to batter all and sundry. It all feels very satisfying. In addition to the brilliant lock-on system, collectable power-ups within the playing field will boost your standard firepower as you rip through waves of enemies, all accompanied by a banging Hitoshi '*Final Fantasy XII*' Sakimoto techno/orchestral crossover soundtrack, that is begging to be turned up loud on account of some tremendous sounding bass.



» *Terra Diver* – very rare in the wild, same classic gameplay.

It could be said that *Soukyugurentai* is not an easy game. It sneakily lures you in with a relatively easy first level, then ramps up the difficulty with some insane bosses and situations where only the most precise and skilful players will survive without pumping the Start button or slamming more coinage into the slot, should you be playing the game in its natural arcade habitat. It is incredibly addictive and compulsive, and has numerous ways you can approach gameplay to maximise your score. For example, not using any of your allocated smart bombs may seem like idiocy – but keeping your full allocation intact means that collecting any subsequent bombs from downed enemies gives you a kick-ass score multiplier. Some equally snooker-loopy players choose to play through the game using only the web and not the standard gun to progress. Whatever floats your boat – but let's face it – unless you are a naturally gifted shmup wunderkind, it will be a good while before you can claim to have 'One Credit' honours on this bad boy.

If you happen to own an NTSC Saturn console or have a means of playing imports, we are pleased to report that it is exceedingly easy to pick up the excellent, near arcade-perfect Saturn conversion for the cost of a budget current-gen title. Arriving in 1997, the game saw the light in Japan only, despite being published by Electronic Arts, and now sits deservedly alongside the likes of *Radiant Silvergun*, *DoDonPachi* and *Layer Section* in the pantheon of classic shooters for Sega's ill-fated 32-bitter, and you really can't get a higher recommendation than that.

PSX-TRAS

It wasn't just the Saturn that got the best shooters, oh no siree. In the case of *Soukyugurentai*, the PlayStation got in on the act too, receiving a highly commendable arcade conversion with an extra yellow ship to choose and some unnecessary FMV sequences. Gameplay is essentially the same but is hampered with more slowdown than the Saturn and slightly more blocky graphics. It is also generally much more expensive to hunt down. The Saturn also received a tweaked version of *Souky* itself. *Soukyugurentai Otokoyo* fixed a problem that made the game glitch when using an Action Replay cartridge, and added support for the analogue controller and a demo of *Battle Garegga*. It is identified in the wild by slightly different box art.



» Taking down one of the huge bosses.



» The pre-rendered settings are awesome.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

Year released: 1993

Original price: $249.99 (USA), £199.99 (UK), Yen 24800 (Japan)

Buy it now for: £20-£40 (eBay)

Associated magazines: Jagwired (fanzine), several inserts, EGM, GameFan, Gamepro, Edge

Why the Jaguar was great… At launch far more powerful than any other cartridge system, considerably cheaper than 3DO, and there would eventually be some amazing exclusive games released. But the Jaguar and CD add-on only truly excelled after Hasbro Interactive relinquished the rights to it. It still thrives today thanks to conventions and a bustling homebrew community.



ATARI JAGUAR



LESS THAN 100 GAMES RELEASED, CORPORATE CEOS WHOSE BEHAVIOUR BEGGARED BELIEF, AND EVENTUAL PUBLIC APATHY; THE JAGUAR WAS A COMMERCIAL FAILURE. YET LOOKING BENEATH THE SURFACE THERE ARE MOMENTS SO AMAZING, THE MACHINE DESERVES AN ENTIRE BOOK DEDICATED TO IT. JOHN SZCZEPANIAK SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON ATARI'S LAST SYSTEM

Atari's Jaguar is one of the most misunderstood and under-utilised consoles in history. In many ways it's comparable to Sega's Dreamcast: both had a short lifespan, have their own dedicated conventions, were the last consoles produced by their respective companies, and both continue to live on through thriving independent development communities.

Despite being championed as an American machine, Jaguar was actually conceived by British minds in Cambridge, Britain becoming a key supporter of Atari's ill-fated beast. The planned VR headset, launch title *Cybermorph*, and critically acclaimed classics *Tempest 2000* and *Alien Vs Predator* were all developed by Brits (though *AVP* had American assistance).

UNCLE CLIVE?

Martin Brennan and John Mathieson, who had left Sinclair Research after Amstrad took over, formed a Cambridge-based company in 1986 called Flare. It's reported they took with them, or were at least influenced by, the designs of the aborted Loki computer project being developed at Sinclair. Regardless of Loki's alleged influence, the pair began work on their own multiprocessor games machine, which eventually became the Jaguar. *Alien Vs Predator* lead programmer Andrew Whittaker has said on record that apparently some of the Loki technology also ended up in the SAM Coupé and as a result it "shared many interesting features with the Jaguar in terms of its video chip."

Brennan and Mathieson wanted to enhance their system's performance, so contacted Atari. Despite working on the eventually abandoned Panther console (which documents show had several similarities to Jaguar), Atari liked what it saw at Flare. Another studio, Flare 2, was formed to complete development of the new 64-bit system. Jaguar progressed quickly and in 1991 Atari cancelled the Panther, despite having said it was ready for production. Jaguar's launch (which some call hasty) was in December 1993, but Europe was severely undersupplied. It was even released in Japan, though wasn't popular (less than 5,000 were reportedly sold), and in March 2006 Famitsu produced a satirical

Jaguar Festival
Good buddies, a few beers, affordable merchandise, and 32-player networked Jag action; internationally held JagFests are the zenith of Atari gaming (image: Euro JagFest 2004). We asked Kevin Manne, original co-organiser of the first 1997 event in Chicago, to tell us more. "JagFest was a way for like-minded gamers to get together and enjoy Jag gaming. The biggest draw, I would say, is the networking abilities – JagFest is the only time you'll get to play a large network of *Battlesphere*, *Air Cars* or even head-to-head *Doom*. Not only would it be very expensive to buy all the necessary hardware, finding enough people willing to play locally can be a challenge. JagFest [also] gives fans the chance to see rare and one-of-a-kind items from each others' collections. Rarities such as the Jaguar VR, Jaguar Voice Modems, prototype and unreleased games are all fascinating pieces of Atari history."





because there was 12-15 of us *total*, doing a Europe-wide launch of a major electronic commodity with absolutely zero budget, getting pages upon pages of press coverage and building an enormous demand. And we were hearing that we were rubbish at marketing, from journalists who knew absolutely nothing about the reality of the situation. You felt like screaming at them 'C'mon then, you come and see if you could do any better with our finances.' But, of course, we couldn't say a word. We just had to keep on going."

The American side of things was markedly different according to Steven Kent, in his *Ultimate History* book. The Tramiels' reputation and previous tactics alienated many – some retailers refused to stock Jaguar. Only a few of the supposed 200 developers that pledged to make games delivered. Of these, several were lazy 16-bit ports that didn't take advantage of the hardware. With more powerful systems from Sony, Sega and Nintendo on the horizon, public apathy set in. People also disliked the controllers. While having 12 numerical keys that you could customise with game-specific overlays was brilliant in theory, most found them cumbersome, arguing they were inferior to SNES pads. Atari tried to remedy this with the Pro Controller, but few games utilised it.

In 1995, after two years of Atari haemorrhaging cash, Sam Tramiel had a heart attack. A year later Atari was 'reverse merged' with Hard Drive manufacturer JTS. Stock plummeted to record lows, the company went bankrupt, Jaguar ceased, and the Atari division was sold to Hasbro Interactive, later bought by Infogrames. Countless other publications have covered these events, but we tracked down, stalked, and, like the proverbial Jaguar, pounced on those who were once there in the vortex.



Other developments
From the Jaguar came exciting developments. Many were cancelled, some were birthed into uncaring public arms, while others were created by fans. The Jamma Stick, Rotary Controllers (*Tempest 2K*), and specialist network equipment all came after the system died. Few know the Jaguar hardware was used for arcades. They added hard drives and tweaked the technology, but it shows the system's power; CoJag (Coin Operated Jaguar) powered the *Area 51* arcade game. Then there was the cancelled Jag Duo (pictured), a combined Jaguar and CD system. There was also the planned VR headset, with a few working prototypes around, and voice modem that would have allowed voice communication during online multiplayer. They also intended for Lynx connectivity; AvP originally used it as a motion tracker, but this was eventually scrapped. Finally, there was Jaguar II that was semi-complete. There were no games, but fans are working to finish it.

video on it. Strangely, Jaguar even officially made its way to Korea! Daryl Still, of Atari UK, spoke openly. "I was marketing manager, PR manager, and co-managed the European Studios (producing titles like *Attack Of The Mutant Penguins* and *Fever Pitch Soccer*). There were only a dozen or so of us left, so we all multitasked!" Mr Still elaborated on initial UK reactions. "The press and retail reaction to the hardware itself was immensely positive. More importantly the public demand was huge. Some of the titles were revolutionary. *Alien Vs Predator* was probably the first FPS that focused on tension and fear instead of non-stop shooting. As a result, Edge misunderstood it entirely and gave it 4/10 and got completely lambasted by the public. The issue we faced was availability. Europe was promised 250K units for the first Christmas, but received only 25K in early December, with a further 25K on 23 December."

Despite initially outselling the nearly triply priced 3DO, Jaguar didn't succeed. Many blame Atari for rushing – higher quality titles were delayed for several months. I asked Daryl Still about any negativity in the UK. "To be honest, we didn't detect any negativity regarding the machine. Some of the software titles were average, but we always had more demand than we could supply for hardware. Coping with consumer demand and frustrations at Christmas was probably the hardest thing. There is nothing worse than a mother who cannot get what her child wants for Christmas, and we had them camping out in our reception in Slough." According to Mr Still, criticisms were raised not at the system, but the company's handling of it. "It was frustrating,

IN THE EYE OF THE JAGUAR

One of the problems was publicly proving Jaguar's strength, something not helped by confusion over 64-bit architecture. US magazines contested its power. Developers, those best to comment,



» If you're looking for a good adventure, try *Highlander* on the Jag CD. It was based not on the films, but on the animated series.

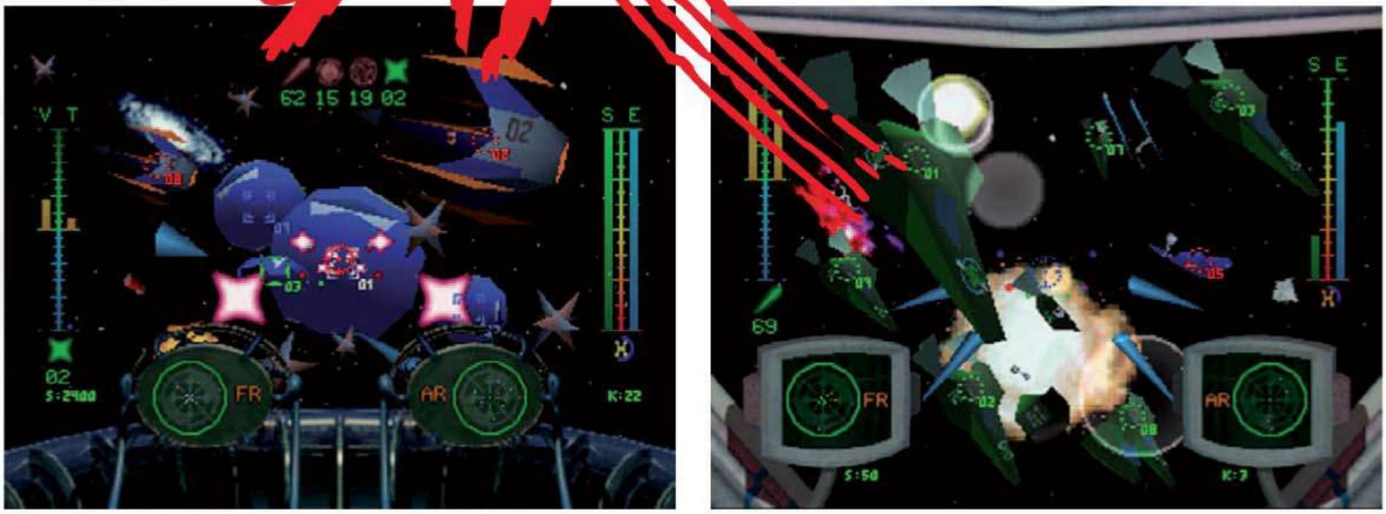


» Atari directly challenged the competition. Look, the company is about to gobble up Sonic, Yoshi and Mario.



» Atari released the Pro Controller near the end, adding three extra face buttons and two shoulder buttons.





» The highly acclaimed *Battlesphere*. Free-roaming combat plus countless ships, explosions, and special effects push the Jaguar more than any other game, showing just how powerful it was.

saw things differently. Prolific assistant to 3D Stooges, Kevin Manne spoke on media attitudes. "It's always been an 'us against them' feeling, trying to squelch common misconceptions. EGM once said the Jag was only 64-bit if you added up the 'bitness' of multiple processors, when in fact [it] does have fully 64-bit components. Once a system gets a bad reputation, it's hard to gain mass acceptance."

Doug Engel of ScatoLOGIC, who co-developed *Battlesphere*, and also ScatBOX hardware, responded fervently. "Jaguar was truly a '64-bit system'. Some people equate bitness with power on a linear scale. It's like equating the number of cylinders in a car engine with horsepower. Most people think a V8 has a huge advantage over a four-cylinder, but [early 20th Century V8s had less power compared to modern four-cylinder engines]. A 64-bit processor from 12 years ago is easily bested by a 32-bit processor made today. There were lots of arguments saying the Jag wasn't 64-bit. Speaking as a developer, I can say it was!"

Even without the confusion of how much 'bit muscle' its Tom and Jerry chips pushed, many labelled the M68000 processor as not only weaker than up-and-coming systems, but barely superior to past consoles. Engel contests this and elaborates. "The Jaguar was most definitely not underpowered compared to systems like the SNES and Genesis. It was difficult to program for because the development tools were in an unfinished state and the hardware had crippling bugs. There was no knowledge base to consult and nobody had experience. Ten years later, there's a lot of sample code and many with experience, so though we still have to use buggy development tools, it's much easier to make games today than when it came out."

At the time no one harnessed the system's true power, only recently have developers really seen what's capable. Skilled programmer Steven Scavone, key member of 3D Stooges that released *Gorf*, still develops for Jaguar. Comparing it to systems he's worked on, Scavone elaborated on tech-specs, also explaining in laymen's terms. "It should be coded in as much assembler as possible. This machine flies when fuelled by assembler. The RISCs in proper concert with the 68k will do some absolutely amazing graphics. The Jaguar could [utterly] crush any 2D system. It's a lot easier to program 2D for than the PSX or N64. You can thank the Tramiels for it being 'underpowered'. The chips were not complete and had bugs. The designers, who weren't experts in silicon design, missed fundamentals. Just one more register and [it could have run without stalling all the time]! If they [had fixed this], the Jag would have blown away the PSX. Later 3D titles like *Battlesphere* proved that systems at the time were no match for it."

Quite a revelation! We questioned Scavone further about the PlayStation comparison. "The textures are cleaner. PSX is faster but

"JAGUAR IS COMPARABLE TO DREAMCAST: BOTH HAVE THEIR OWN DEDICATED CONVENTIONS, WERE THE LAST CONSOLES PRODUCED BY SAID COMPANIES, AND BOTH LIVE ON THROUGH INDEPENDENT DEVELOPMENT"

much uglier and unfixable [since it's built into the] hardware. Jaguar is more flexible and can [remove texture] ugliness. Then there's the VLM in the CD player, which blows PSX away in disc access speed, [which] was awful with load times. Jaguar was surprisingly fast."

High profile coder Scott LeGrand, who co-developed *Battlesphere* alongside Engel, gave his own comparisons. "The Jaguar was anything but underpowered. It had more computational firepower than anything else of that era, including the original PlayStation. [Jaguar] was actually easier to code for than the Saturn. However, PlayStation had hardware 3D acceleration, was a dream to code, and had Sony's



» Jeff Minter is going to be really angry with us… but we preferred *Protector SE* over *Defender 2000*.



JAGUAR

"THERE WERE LOTS OF ARGUMENTS SAYING THE JAG WASN'T 64-BIT. SPEAKING AS A DEVELOPER, I CAN SAY IT WAS!"
DOUG ENGEL







» **Above:** *Alien Vs Predator* was the game that convinced many to buy the system. Even today it's still a supremely playable FPS.

marketing muscle behind it. Atari didn't stand a chance." PlayStation had built-in hardware acceleration; everything had to be done manually with Jaguar. LeGrand explains more, "*BattleSphere* might have looked better on the PSX [in terms of raw polygon count], but its gameplay would have suffered. The Jaguar's multiple CPUs let me do things with physics and AI that were a good five years ahead of the rest of the industry. It wasn't until *Halo* that I finally felt utterly outgunned."

It had untapped potential, so we challenged the developer on its failure. LeGrand laments, "Destiny, pure destiny. But not for the reasons everyone thinks. The Jaguar was a dream to code compared to the PS2. The real reason is that the Tramiels didn't have the resources to put together an adequate developer relations program, nor did they spend money to [license] titles like *Mortal Kombat 2* (would have been the smartest $1M ever spent). Sony had money, big money."

LeGrand's colleague Engel complains there's too much to cover, adding, "Can't you write a book on this instead of just an article? Most of the problems relate to the fact that Atari was too small to compete with the giants. Jaguar was rushed because Atari didn't have the resources to [finish it on time]. Atari lacked the money to properly market it, and they made some poor choices when it came to [licensing] titles."

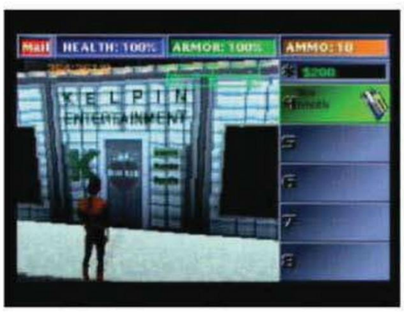
Arguably the biggest Jaguar collector in the world, Jason Smith of www.jaysmith2000.com, who provided resources for this article, agrees with Engel. "Atari marketing for the Jaguar left a lot to be desired that's for sure! A big part of the downfall without question."

Those working close to them weren't pleased with the Tramiels, as LeGrand explains. "The Tramiel kids meant well, all of them, but the skills required to run a corporation just weren't in them. These guys would run around poaching cash-starved, but innovative technology, and then inject the family fortune into it, until it [failed]. Then they'd pull the plug without telling anyone. [That's exactly what they did with Jaguar]. Working with Atari was nonsensical. They were great at getting their technology into the hands of developers, but they didn't have the resources to put together competent developer support."

Internal Jaguar employee BeeJ West, who worked on BIWN, gave a lengthy and scathing critique of Atari USA. Some printable highlights, "The situation [there] might have broken less hardy souls. What did I think of Atari? Damn, there's an entire book there. I was utterly horrified by the state of affairs. [Anyone] could see something was rotten in the state of Tramiel. Everyone who worked on *Trevor McFur* knew the game was a total stinker, and the development environment made [finishing] even such a lame game nearly impossible. [It] was so hostile and adversarial [at Atari, that everything] took eight times longer. If that hadn't been the case, Atari might still be in business."

Engel was calmer with his appraisal of the Jaguar situation, "They helped occasionally, but mostly ignored us. I could write reams of stories about them, but I don't want this article to turn into a bash-fest. They did do some positive things. They deserve credit for sending us a devkit when we were starting out and had no reputation as a developer."

But all of the above is the American side of events. The UK branch was run very differently by Daryl Still. "It was a real mixed bag of emotions, because the buzz was huge, the excitement terrific, but the frustration of not receiving inventory was soul destroying. There were some tremendously talented people there. Really committed people who just thrived upon working with great product, and there was no doubt that Jaguar was a potentially huge piece of hardware. We had total autonomy over how we ran things in Europe. The biggest problem was the US office couldn't see beyond their own markets and pretty much dominated the available inventory. This was a historical problem,

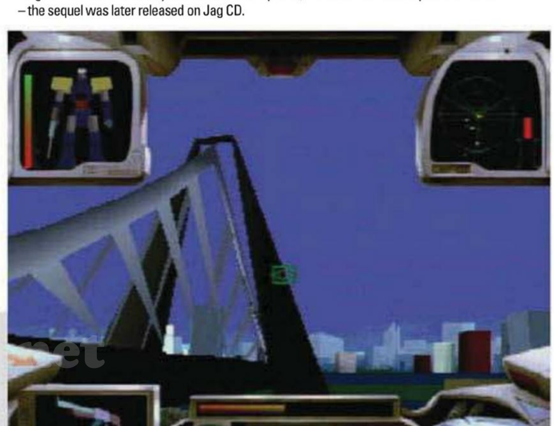




» Innovative and hugely anticipated, the eventually cancelled *Black Ice/White Noise* would have played like a cross between *Shadowrun* and *GTA3*.

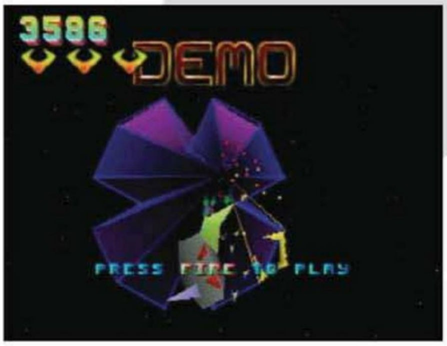


» **Above:** For the Global Gaming fans: one of many two-page Jaguar adverts found in Korean magazines! **Below:** Destroy entire cities with aplomb, in the German developed *Iron Soldier* – the sequel was later released on Jag CD.

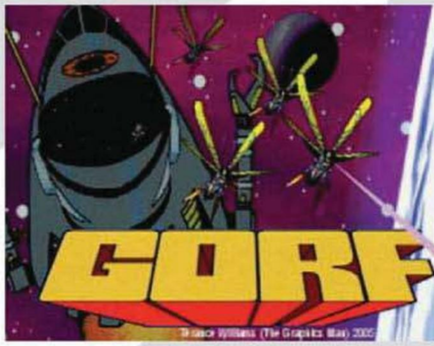




» Information on dedicated Jaguar magazines is scant, but there were several inserts provided free with other mags.



» Along with *AVP*, Jeff Minter's *Tempest 2000* is rightly heralded as one of the finest games on the Jaguar.



» Not only is the post-mortem-released *Gorf* for the Jag CD absolutely arcade perfect, but it helped re-invigorate the independent development scene.



» Ubisoft's sumptuously wonderful *Rayman* game, which according to sources began life on Jaguar as a proposed exclusive.

dating back to the ST. If the US had learned from our [European success with the ST], and given us equal status with inventory and budget, I believe Atari could [have still been a] hardware force today. We produced some great hardware in those days, and backed them up with some super (and some less super) software titles, and I believe, by default, we set a number of practices that people like Sony learned from (both how to and how not to do things)."

DEFENCE AND ALLURE

At this point Karl Morris, who runs www.atari-explorer.com and went to great lengths aiding this article, speaks in Atari's defence, while also providing scans of their financial documents on his website. "With respect to yet more Tramiel bashing, I hope this doesn't seep into the article. Mistakes were made by Atari, but it was imperative the system launched in 1993. Atari pulled out all the stops to ensure Jaguar was a success. To say Atari was putting all its eggs into one basket is an understatement; Jaguar had to work or it was curtains for the company. To bash the [Tramiel] management who were working on thin-air budgets with a one-way-ticket product is silly. It's easy in hindsight to suggest what should have been done. Great people worked there and got behind the product 100 per cent. They all knew what was at stake, and when it started to go wrong and the numbers weren't adding up, and [Sam] had a heart attack, Jack came back and did what any sane person would do: protect his family's interests. The Jaguar is a fine piece of hardware; unfortunately the gamble didn't work out for Atari. Let's not harp on about how 'the Tramiels killed the Jaguar' when it was [they] who made it happen."

Even with such debate, the atmosphere is forever jovial and amicable. Which many declare, is part of the allure. Jaguar fans are a relaxed close-knit group; the regular JagFests prove this. We enquire further, about passionate support for a dead system. High profile collector Jason Smith comments, "I think the primary allure of the Jaguar is that it was Atari's final system. Atari has a *huge* following and the Jaguar, without question, was its most powerful offering. Another part for me is all the amazing hardware they were working on that actually became 'working' prototypes. The Jaguar VR, Cortina, Jaguar Voice Modem, etc. They were way ahead of their time."

Another big reason, and one that makes it worth tracking down today, is the continued release of games and independent development community that exists. Dreamcast and Jaguar coder Mickey McMurray reflects. "The biggest draw to the Jaguar is the fact that [it was] made an open system. The documentation, tools, and encryption keys are all available legally for anyone who wants them. Since the Jaguar is free for anyone to tinker with, people can release software, hardware modification and add-ons without fear of legal problems. The JagFests are successful because of this – they have new games and hardware to keep Jaguar fans coming back."

This raises a fascinating precedent, since in 1999 after petitioning, Hasbro Interactive officially, and commendably, released the rights to Jaguar. Something unthinkable to other hardware companies. More importantly the encryption keys to both cartridge and CD games were discovered by Curt Vendel of the Atari Museum, hidden on long-forgotten Atari floppies that were sold after the collapse. Now anyone can develop games, especially on CD, that will run on unmodified machines. This makes owning a Jag CD essential, as many modern releases are on disc.

As well as coding their own projects and unlocking the system's true power, the fans petitioned companies like Telegames to publish stillborn titles. During collapse Atari was sitting on dozens of fantastic, though sometimes only semi-complete games, many of which it's argued would have saved Atari. With no licensing restrictions the community has been, and will continue, finishing these games themselves, then releasing them. Hence why some titles only came out in 2000 and beyond. Unfinished prototypes are also released. With countless proto CDs in his possession, rather than hoarding them, Jason Smith set about making compilations and distributing them among fans. This is another highlight of the community; while unreleased Dreamcast prototypes bit-rot in the hands of private collectors, Jaguar fans, for the most part, happily share things. Which is why BIWN is freely available on the internet and why all profit made on *Battlesphere* was donated to charity. With so many developments that have happened in recent years, there has never been a better time to invest in a Jaguar. With a strange sense of bitter irony, the Jaguar only truly came to life after its death.



» The Jamma Joystick, by Dan Loosen of goatstore.com, is just one of many hardware pieces designed, manufactured, and distributed by fans.

"WITH A STRANGE SENSE OF BITTER IRONY, THE JAGUAR ONLY CAME TO LIFE AFTER ITS DEATH"

SPECIAL THANKS TO
Many special thanks to Jaguar Sector II and http://www.jaysmith2000.com/ for providing developers' contacts. Thanks also to Karl Morris of www.atari-explorer.com for donating several images, and www.goatstore.com for assistance



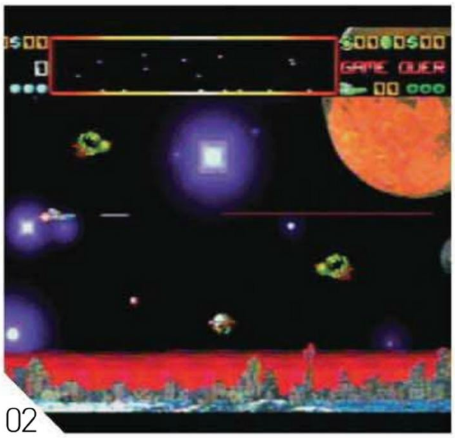
ATARI JAGUAR PERFECT TEN GAMES



Atari's Jaguar had so much untapped potential that it pains us to see it so openly scorned by the majority of gamers nowadays, who believe that the only decent games on it were *Alien Vs Predator* and the supremely trippy *Tempest 2000*. Those in the know, however, are fully aware of the great games the system boasted, you just have to know what they are.



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02



03



04

BATTLESPHERE

- » **RELEASED:** 2000
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SCATOLOGIC INC
- » **CREATED BY:** 4PLAY
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SCATBOX HARDWARE ACCESSORY

01 **The epic space opera *BattleSphere* (both normal and enhanced Gold versions) is a triumphant example of what the Jaguar is truly capable of.** Filled with clever references to popular sci-fi creations, you choose one of seven known intergalactic races (including humans), before being placed in a fully 3D sphere of space and battling it out to become champion. Visually nothing short of stunning, the dynamic AI also impresses, and for a time was unsurpassed. It's also one of the few games that supports up to 32 simultaneous human players over a network (although you're going to have to find a convention in order to experience this. As a kind gesture, all profits from sales of the game were donated to charity. Special thanks to the Official Battlesphere Website for providing our images.

PROTECTOR SE

- » **RELEASED:** 2002
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** SONGBIRD PRODUCTIONS
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PROTECTOR

02 **If you're looking for a superb update of *Defender*, it's this excellent offering from Songbird Productions that you should be searching out and not Jeff Minter's *Defender 2000*.** The graphics truly are stunning and feature some of the best 2D visuals we've ever seen on Atari's 64-bit console, hell, any console from that period for that matter. Sound is also excellent, with a great array of sampled voices and some rocking tunes that perfectly capture the frantic on-screen action. Insanely fast, full of excitement and sporting some very nifty power-ups, this is a perfect example of twitch gaming and deserves to be in every Jaguar owner's collection. If you're a fan of Eugene Jarvis' original game or just love a good blaster then pick it up. You're not going to be disappointed.

TEMPEST 2000

- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
- » **CREATED BY:** JEFF MINTER
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DEFENDER 2000

03 **Jeff Minter's *Tempest 2000* is justification-enough for picking up Atari's ill-fated console.** Beautiful to look at, incredible to listen to, witnessing *Tempest 2000* in action is the equivalent of having a synapse explode in your brain, such is the impact of Minter's masterpiece. Forget the incredibly poor port of the original arcade game that has been included and just concentrate on spending all your spare time with *Tempest Duel*; a gripping deathmatch for two players and of course, the stupendously good *Tempest 2000*. With new enemies, the ability to jump, a selection of smart power-ups, scintillating sound and those eye-melting visuals, this is perhaps Minter on his finest form. Luckily this is one of the most common Jaguar games available, so it won't cost you an arm and a leg.

GORF CLASSIC (CD)

- » **RELEASED:** 2006
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** 3D STOOGES
- » **CREATED BY:** JAMIE FENTON
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NA

04 **The original arcade version of *Gorf* was developed by Jamie Fenton and released in 1981.** It featured five progressive and very different levels, and also several digitised voice samples that heckled the player. The Jaguar CD port by 3D Stooges, which was created after the system's death and rekindled the development community, has the honour of being the only arcade perfect port to home systems that has all five of the original levels (due to licensing issues, the 3rd *Galaxians* level was normally removed). Unfortunately, due to popularity and a low print run, this is now fairly rare and expensive on eBay, so if you intend to track it down make sure you're carrying a full wallet. A fun, frantic shooter that you'll return to again and again.

IRON SOLDIER 1/II

- » **RELEASED:** 1994-7
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI/ TELEGAMES
- » **CREATED BY:** ECLIPSE SOFTWARE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NA

05 **We're mentioning both *Iron Soldier 1* and *II* as they're perfect examples of what the Jaguar and Jaguar CD could do in capable hands.** Both titles require you to storm around in a huge mech and lay waste to whatever is foolish (or unfortunate) enough to get in your way. Each game feature expansive environments (although the CD version has greatly improved visuals and a storming soundtrack) a variety of well-structured missions and some of the most amazing explosions in any Jaguar game. Some may baulk at the slow pace of both games, but with so much to learn (*Iron Soldier II* boasts even more controls than the already comprehensive original) you'll actually be glad you have some time to think.



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ALIEN VS PREDATOR

- » **RELEASED:** 1994
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
- » **CREATED BY:** REBELLION
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SNIPER ELITE

06 **Never mind the fact that *Alien Vs Predator* was released a good year after being a supposed launch title, it was a landmark title for both the Jaguar and first-person shooters in general, thus making it more than worth the wait.** While *AVP* boasted spectacular visuals (which still impress today) it was the sound that truly impressed. With no music, creator Rebellion used a selection of screams, explosions and gunshots to punctuate the silence of each well-constructed stage. It was gameplay where *AVP* truly excelled, though, and while the floaty controls could be annoying, the different attributes of the three main protagonists – human, alien or predator – and strategic gameplay more than made up for it.

HIGHLANDER (CD)

- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
- » **CREATED BY:** LORE DESIGN LIMITED
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NA

07 **The Jaguar and CD add-on were starved of traditional adventures and RPGs (the only other notable exception being *Towers II*, though that's a fairly boring dungeon crawler).** So adventures like *Highlander*, which was exclusive to the system, is something to get very excited about indeed. Based not on the films' franchise (which was killed by three totally unnecessary sequels) but rather the animated TV series, you play Quentin MacLeod on his quest against rogue immortal Kortan. Controls are comparable to *Resident Evil* – you're able to defeat enemies using fists, sword or a gun, while searching for items that allow progress. Highly recommended, the only problem is needing a MemoryTrack peripheral in order to save. A unique and enjoyable title that's well worth tracking down.

RAYMAN

- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** UBISOFT
- » **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** KING KONG

08 **Decent platformers are few and far between on Atari's Jaguar, so when a title with the quality of *Rayman* comes along you can't really afford to miss it.** Originally created exclusively for Atari's machine (it was later ported to the PlayStation and other consoles like the Saturn) Michael Ancel's platformer still looks sumptuous and boasts some utterly stunning locations. Filled with layer upon layer of parallax scrolling and beautiful, hand-drawn sprites it's an amazing technical achievement and perfectly shows off previous claims about the Jaguar's 2D power. Despite the game's toughness there's no denying the adorability of *Rayman*, and it's little wonder that Michael Ancel's creation is still appearing in games today. Indeed, Ubisoft released a *Rayman* title for Nintendo's Wii not so long ago.

BI/WN (CD)

- » **RELEASED:** 2004
- » **FREELY RELEASED BY:** BEEJ WEST (DEVELOPER)
- » **CREATED BY:** ATARI
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DONKEY KONG

09 ***Black Ice/White Noise* was not officially released due to being cancelled before completion; but since it was such an ambitious title and because the beta can be freely downloaded online, we thought it must be mentioned!** Having read the full and unedited Jagwire interviews with the developer, its history alone warrants several articles. The team had a unique vision, which today is comparable to a cross between *Shadowrun* without magic (or more accurately *Neuromancer*) and *GTA 3*. Players would have been able to traverse a massive cityscape while completing missions, riding vehicles, shooting police, hacking computer networks, talking with NPCs, etc. Sadly, among other things, overly high ambitions killed the project.

MISSILE COMMAND 3D

- » **RELEASED:** 1995
- » **PUBLISHED BY:** ATARI
- » **CREATED BY:** VIRTUALITY
- » **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NA

10 **Despite the Jaguar's VR Headset never getting released, Atari still saw fit to release *Missile Command 3D* that featured a VR version of the game few Jaguar owners will have been able to play.** Apart from this obvious oversight, the VR version in particular is great fun to play and gives you a clear example of just how immersive the game would have actually been. Starting off in an underwater base, you'll soon progress above ground and into space itself. All the while missiles are furiously raining down on you and despite the first-person viewpoint it perfectly captures the essence of the original game. Speaking of the original, Virtuality also included it, but as with the *Tempest* seen in *Tempest 2000*, it was a far from perfect port.

ATARI JAGUAR



and the rest...

While you had to look very hard for them, Atari's Jaguar did boast some solid titles. Many of them are now extremely difficult to track down and can fetch a pretty penny on eBay. See how many titles you recognise...

01 BALDIES
02 PINBALL FANTASIES
03 TROY AIKMAN NFL FOOTBALL
04 HIGHLANDER
05 ATTACK OF THE MUTANT PENGUINS
06 INTERNATIONAL SENSIBLE SOCCER
07 IRON SOLDIER
08 TOTAL CARNAGE
09 KASUMI NINJA
10 DOOM
11 MISSILE COMMAND 3D
12 TEMPEST 2000
13 HYPER FORCE
14 ATARI KARTS
15 FLASHBACK
16 NBA JAM: TOURNAMENT EDITION
17 WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP
18 SOCCER KID
19 BRAINDEAD 13
20 CYBERMORPH (2MEG)
21 PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE
22 SYNDICATE
23 DOUBLE DRAGON
24 MYST
25 WORLD TOUR RACING
26 CLUB DRIVE
27 FIGHT FOR LIFE
28 PROTECTOR
29 WOLFENSTEIN 3D
30 CANNON FODDER
31 ALIEN VS PREDATOR
32 TREVOR MCFUR IN THE CRESCENT GALAXY
33 IRON SOLDIER 2
34 SPEEDSTER 2
35 BUSBY: FRACTURED FURRY TAILS
36 EVOLUTION: DINO DUDES
37 HOVER STRIKE
38 OCEAN DEPTHS
39 FLIP OUT
40 FEVER PITCH SOCCER
41 SKYHAMMER
42 POWER DRIVE RALLY
43 TOWERS II
44 RAYMAN
45 SPACE WAR 2000
46 VID GRID
47 DRAGON'S LAIR
48 AIR CARS
49 RAIDEN
50 I-WAR
51 THEME PARK
52 SUPER BURNOUT
53 ZOOL 2
54 CHEQUERED FLAG
55 RUINER PINBALL
56 WORMS
57 DEFENDER 2000
58 SPACE ACE
59 ZERO 5
60 BATTLEMORPH
61 GORF CLASSIC
62 JAGMIND: BOMB SQUAD
63 ULTRA VORTEK

SCREENSHOTS COURTESY OF ATARI AGE

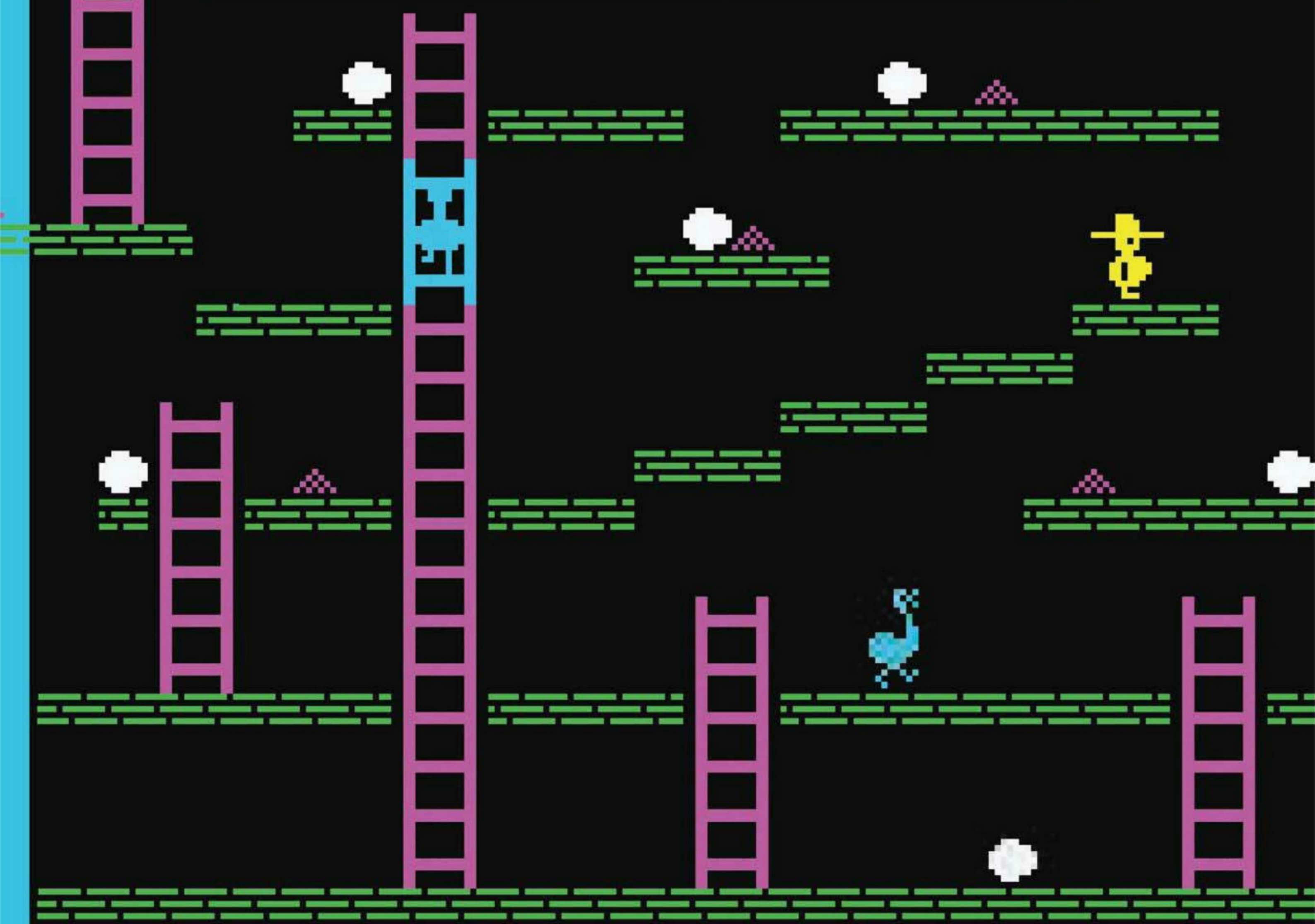



05
06
07
08
09
Senzo
Alaric
14
15
16
JOHNSON
ROBINSON
17
18
23
SEKKA
HOTEL
24
Catherine,
I've left for you a message
of utmost importance in
our fore-chamber beside
the dock. Enter the number
of Marker Switches on
this island into the imager
to retrieve the message.
Yours,
Atrus
25
LAP
0/3
26
27
32
33
34
00:10
35
36
41
42
43
Gerand is a level 1 character.
44
45
50
BASES 0
ALPHA MATRIX
51
"B" BRINGS UP DETAILS OF TREES. WE
YOU CAN BUY. "A" BRINGS UP A QUICK
ALL AVAILABLE STUFF
52
53
54
100 MPH
POSITION
GEAR 2
LAP 1
59
60
61
MISSION: 1
000000
000000
000000
GAME OVER
62
63
DISARMING CODE
INVALID
MERCURY
FIGHT!
WorldMags.net

THE MAKING OF...

CHUCKIE EGG

What do Donkey Kong and Space Panic have in common? Answer: they went on to inspire Nigel Alderton to create an all-time classic on the humble Spectrum, which would be ported to every computer format of the time. Kim Wild finds out how this eggstraordinary title came to life





» The sequel *Chuckie Egg 2* wasn't bad but it never lived up to the original outing.



» The C64 conversion included six difficulty levels, a new addition to the original game.



» The Amstrad CPC version has a devoted following, being quite close to the BBC Micro game.

Every system has a killer app or a series of titles that makes it stand out, even if said games appear elsewhere. Game Boy had *Tetris*, NES had *Mario*, Master System had *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* and the Mega Drive kicked off an obsession with all things hedgehog related. The Spectrum isn't any different and if you ask any owner what games stand out, you can guarantee that alongside *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*, *Chuckie Egg* will get a mention, while many others will cite the BBC Micro version as one of that format's major stars. For teenager Nigel Alderton, the Spectrum would become a pathway to a new world of game creation. "My first computer was a bog-standard ZX81 with 1K of RAM. My parents soon got fed up with me using it on the family TV so they got me a portable black-and-white telly for my bedroom. I loved [the Spectrum]. For a programmer it was such a simple piece of kit to use because you could bypass the operating system and control the hardware directly. Its weaknesses were the blocky character-based colour and lack of a sound processor or reliable storage media."

It would be during Nigel Alderton's mid-teens that the talented programmer would get to put his new-found skills to use. "I think I was about 15 when I got a Saturday job in [the A+F] shop serving customers, duplicating tapes, fetching bacon butties for the programmers and management and just helping out in general. I got £7 for the day, which wasn't bad at the time. I'd been working there for a few months when I told them that I was writing a game myself and asked them if they would look at it. All the programmers there had games published themselves and I was just the kid who made the tea, so they were mildly amused by my request. But one weekend I showed one of the programmers my unfinished *Eggy Kong* game and I still remember the pride I felt when I saw his reaction. Suddenly he was talking to me on a level – asking questions and taking an interest. I never thought of offering it to anyone other than A+F."

A+F Software was founded by Doug Anderson and Mike Fitzgerald in 1981 who began publishing titles for the Acorn Atom and BBC Micro and were responsible for games such as *Polecat* and *Early Warning*. However, it would be Nigel Alderton's *Eggy Kong* (renamed by A+F Software as *Chuckie Egg*) that would launch the company into the spotlight and make its fortunes. Nigel's original title of *Eggy Kong* highlights the influence of a certain gorilla created by Shigeru Miyamoto. "It was inspired by arcade games that I was addicted to at the time. The newsagent on the way to school had classic games like *Donkey Kong* and *Scramble*. At one point it had a lesser-known game called *Space Panic*. *Chuckie Egg* is a cross between *Space Panic* and *Donkey Kong*. Almost every weekday for a couple of years I put a good part of my dinner money into those machines," recalls Nigel Alderton. His love for *Space Panic* meant that *Chuckie Egg* was effectively an unofficial follow-up. "I designed a game that I thought I would enjoy playing myself. I wasn't a big fan of *Manic Miner*-style puzzles so I made *Chuckie Egg* more about dexterity than problem solving – more fast-and-furious than thoughtful. At the time my favourite game was *Space Panic*, so *Chuckie Egg* is really *Space Panic 2*. It's a bit embarrassing now looking back at screenshots of *Space Panic* and *Chuckie Egg* together – and how similar they look!"

"AT THE TIME MY FAVOURITE GAME WAS SPACE PANIC, SO CHUCKIE EGG IS REALLY SPACE PANIC 2"

NIGEL ALDERTON

It has been stated in the past that only the first level of *Chuckie Egg* had been completed when shown to A+F Software but Nigel Alderton is keen to set the record straight. "Actually I'd coded five out of the eight screen layouts before I took it to A+F, but they only saw the first level that day because the code to collect eggs and move to the next level wasn't working. The game was still in monochrome at that stage too – the colour overlaying was added later – but the majority of the game coding was complete and most of the memory was already either used or allocated for animation."

While Nigel Alderton continued to program his Spectrum game, Doug Anderson would work on the BBC Micro version alongside it and although the two titles are mainly identical, there are a few subtle nuances. Aside from the colour variations, the speeds of the character



» The Acorn Electron had a particular affinity with pink and really big birds.

CHUCKIE'S REVENGE

One of the better-known remakes has been a PC version cloned on the BBC Micro release. Mike Elson spoke to us regarding the remake. "The most essential tool was a commercial BBC emulator called pcBBC that I used to play the original to take screenshots to get the look right. To work out the jump patterns I ran the emulator in 'slow-motion' mode and took a screenshot after each re-draw… many of the moves that were possible in the original are recreated faithfully, but there were always things like bouncing off platforms, which I never got right. I got the samples by playing *Chuckie* on a real BBC with wires running from its internal speaker to the sound card of a PC, and recording sections of gameplay to edit down into raw sounds." To download the game, visit this website: http://vroomfondel.net/chuckie

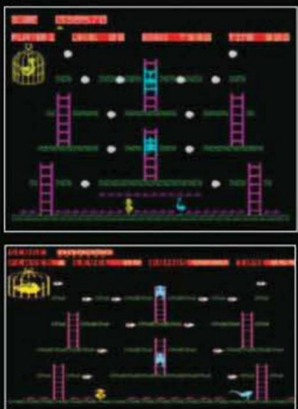


IN THE KNOW

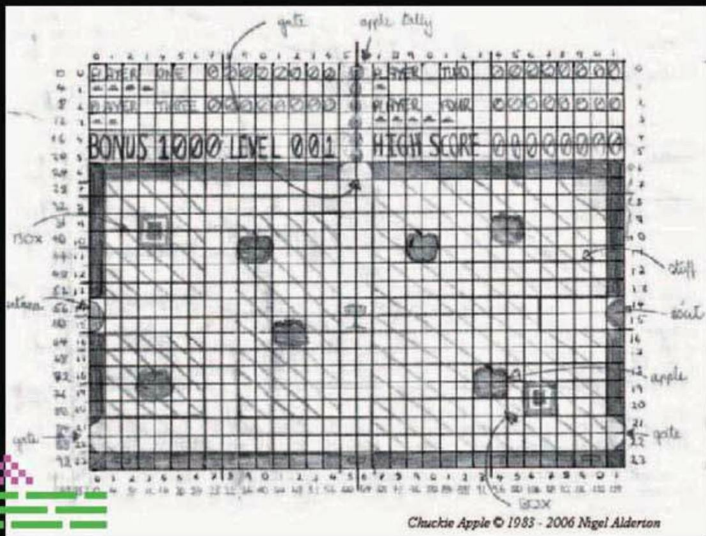


- **PUBLISHER:** A+F SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** NIGEL ALDERTON
- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £2+

THE MAKING OF...
CHUCKIE EGG



» Level 8 differs slightly in egg layout in the Spectrum (top) and BBC Micro versions.



» The design document for the never-completed *Chuckie Apple* (courtesy of www.bagshot-row.org/chuckie-egg)



» The MSX version uses a variety of colours and gives Harry a bigger hat.

Hen House Harry, the lifts, the hens and mother duck all differ, while movement of Harry (especially while jumping) has a different rhythm in the BBC version. The BBC Micro also suffers from a bug, where it is possible to fall through the lift if the timing of the jump is not right. Level 8 has some layout alterations, where the arrangement of the eggs are stacked in a different way. The Spectrum and BBC Micro games are the ones that are most fondly remembered, with the latter often sneakily played by schoolchildren on their classroom machines when the teacher wasn't looking. Initially nameless, the game's main character was christened Hen House Harry by "a bloke at A+F who wrote the blurb for the back of the cassette," according to Alderton.

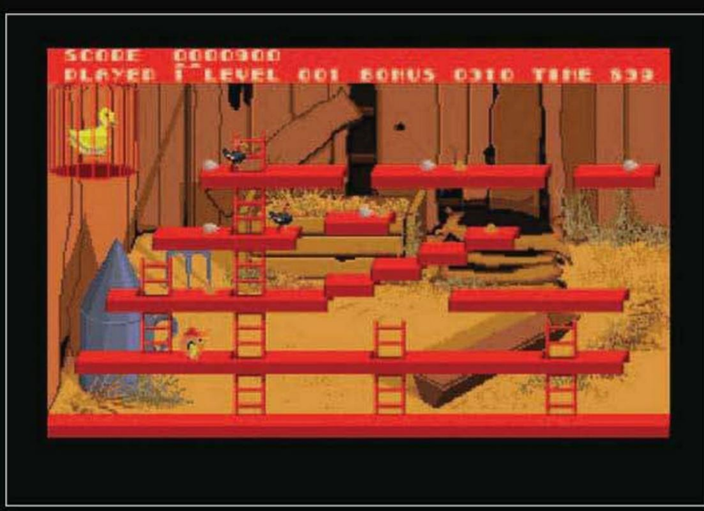
In 1983, *Chuckie Egg* would be released and the self-publishing nature of the business meant a lot of the packing was done in-house. "If a big order came in, everyone mucked in. Blank audio cassettes were unboxed and the card inserts replaced with the ones for the game, the blank tapes were put into cassette decks to record from the master, then re-boxed when they had finished recording. All done by hand."

Shortly after its release on Spectrum and BBC Micro, the company would convert *Chuckie Egg* to other computer formats including Dragon 32, C64, Electron, MSX, Amstrad and Einstein; and although Nigel Alderton wasn't involved with the ports, he was impressed with the results. "Most of the conversions are excellent, especially given the hardware restrictions of some of the machines like the C64 and Acorn Electron. I think the BBC version is probably the slickest, but I prefer my Spectrum original!"

Interestingly enough, its appeal is because the game can't be completed – with the pattern looping at level 40, Hen House Harry gets to carry on, seemingly destined to collect eggs and avoid rampaging birds for the rest of his natural life. Although the pattern remains the same, from level 48 the clock time decreases, making the game far more challenging without the need to add more content. *Chuckie Egg* is a high score game, where many gamers spend countless hours notching up points in the millions, trying to outdo each other to become the best *Chuckie Egg* player. Alderton explains that its lack of an ending was all part of the original design: "It was a conscious decision. I didn't enjoy the feeling of completing a game – I preferred it to go on and on."

The pressures of time to get the game finished meant that there were some ideas that never made it into the game, including the concept of two mother

"I WANTED TO HAVE AN EXTRA EIGHT LEVELS WHERE THERE ARE TWO FLYING BIRDS CHASING YOU SIMULTANEOUSLY INSTEAD OF ONE" NIGEL ALDERTON



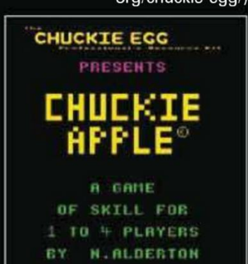
» Amiga and Atari ST versions had a graphical revamp, but suffered in the gameplay department.



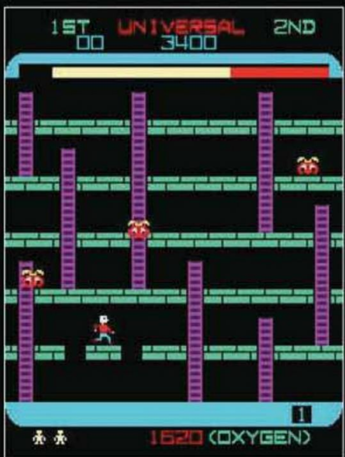
» Unofficial versions were released, including this one that featured new levels and incorporated cheats (BBC Micro).

THE GAME THAT NEVER WAS

Despite not having any input into official sequel *Chuckie Egg 2 (Choccy Egg)*, Nigel Alderton began work on a new game in the series entitled *Chuckie Apple* on the Spectrum. Aiming to be similar in style to *Mr Do*, it was to feature "lots of bouncing apples and things." Sadly, it never even reached programming status. "Like *Chuckie Egg* it borrowed heavily from arcade games, but it barely got past the concept stage because I went to work for Ocean Software as an employee and I lost interest in it," recalls Alderton. "I did do some drawings at the time that I found recently. I don't think it would have been as good as *Chuckie Egg*." A PDF containing early drawings and general gameplay information about *Chuckie Apple* can be found at The Chuckie Egg Professional Resource Kit website (http://www.bagshot-row.org/chuckie-egg/)



"I HAVEN'T MADE ANY MONEY OUT OF IT FOR YEARS BUT THE BRAGGING RIGHTS ARE PRICELESS" NIGEL ALDERTON



» This is *Space Panic*, the source (alongside *Donkey Kong*) of Nigel Alderton's inspiration.

ducks chasing Hen House Harry around the screen. There has been something of a widespread myth that two mother ducks featured in the original *Chuckie Egg* ,but we would like to debunk this right now as down to someone who has possibly been eating too many eggs. It was an idea that Nigel Alderton would have liked to have implemented, though. "There were a couple of ideas that I wanted to include and just about had the memory available to do so, but didn't because A+F were putting pressure on me to get the game released. If they hadn't it may never have got finished. I wanted to have an extra eight levels where there are two flying birds chasing you simultaneously instead of just one. Then a further eight levels where there are two flying birds plus the ostriches. Then a further eight levels where there are two flying birds, plus the ostriches, plus disappearing ladders. I could have gone on forever!"

The sales of *Chuckie Egg* meant that A+F Software was keen to capitalise on the game's success so the company worked internally on the sequel *Chuckie Egg 2 (Choccy Egg)*. But as Nigel Alderton had just been a freelancer for A+F for the original game and then left to work for Ocean Software on *Kong Strikes Back*, the direction of the series was left entirely to the whim of the internal development team. "I wasn't involved in *Chuckie Egg 2* at all," says Alderton. "I didn't like the original concept, nor did I like the way A+F went about fleshing out the design, which was basically 'design-by-committee'." An entirely different style of game, *Choccy Egg* involved Hen House Harry navigating 120 screens in a *Dizzy* wannabe adventure, collecting items to help run a chocolate factory of Easter Eggs. Although popular enough to warrant releases on the Amiga and Atari ST, the game failed to emerge from the shadow of the original, suffering from its adventure game pretensions under the *Chuckie Egg* branding.

While A+F continued to release games such as *Cylon Attack*, *Kamakazi*, *Orpheus* and *Pharaoh's Tomb*, none lived up to the genius of *Chuckie Egg* or brought the kind of sales that the latter accumulated (over a million) and the company went bust in 1985. It would re-emerge as MC Lothlorien (later renamed Icon Design and then Tudor World), producing hurried conversions of both *Chuckie Egg* games for Amiga, Atari ST and PC in the late Eighties before also folding in 1991.

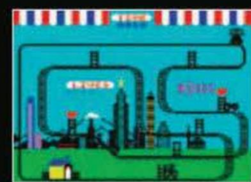
The advent of the internet has meant that *Chuckie Egg* fever has since gone into overdrive, with many fans setting up websites and creating remakes. "The amount of work that must go into them is incredible and very flattering," says Alderton. "Yes I have played a few of them, and some of their creators have been in touch by email just out of courtesy. One guy has even printed a *Chuckie Egg* T-shirt!" Alderton continues, "I'm very proud. I haven't actually made any money out of it for years but the bragging rights are priceless," says Alderton. "I can't pinpoint the secret of its success if it has one, but at the time I designed it I was addicted to arcade games and I'm sure that helped somehow."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KONG STRIKES BACK (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1985

COMMANDO
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986





» A hacked version of *Chuckie Egg* (BBC Micro) was released to the community with extra colours.



STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

RETURN OF THE KING



- **PUBLISHER** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £6+



HISTORY

Regular readers of **Retro Gamer** will no doubt be aware that I don't exactly have a lot of love for Capcom's seminal brawler. Don't get me wrong. I'm fully aware of its historical importance and realise that plenty of people still play it on a regular basis but after witnessing the glorious choreography of *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike*, its older peer appeared to have nothing new to offer. How wrong I was…

Thanks to Capcom, and more importantly, Xbox Live Arcade, I've been able to re-discover the joy of *Street Fighter II*, or more specifically, *Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting* (or *Turbo* as it's known to us Brits). While the original *Street Fighter II* remains a slow, turgid experience (sorry guys, but it's true) *Turbo* gives the game a much-needed boost of speed and ensures that bouts are always satisfying to play. New costumes, extra moves and re-designed backdrops were just a few of the additions that Capcom included and I still have the cool metal tin that it was lovingly packaged in.

While later titles have presented us with more character choices than ever, ridiculous specials and the beauty that is parrying, there's still something immensely satisfying about a no-nonsense round of *Turbo*. There's no need to worry about pulling off double fireball motions, you won't moan over the cheapness of *Third Strike's* Chun-Li and Ken, you can just concentrate on mastering the good, old fashioned art of beating the hell out of each other. Sure, the character models look a little old-school now and the animation has lost a lot of its slickness over the years, but even with these niggles (and that's all they really are) *Turbo's* gameplay remains resoundingly solid.

I'll still drop this latest incarnation of *Street Fighter II* as soon as Microsoft gets around to emulating the superior *Third Strike* properly for the 360, but in the meantime I'll be rekindling my love for one of Capcom's greatest fighters.


KO
63
RYU



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



SNK (PART ONE)

ASK ANY GAMER TODAY ABOUT SNK, AND THE RESPONSES WILL ALWAYS BE NEO GEO, KING OF THE FIGHTERS AND METAL SLUG. BUT AS MIKE TOOLEY REVEALS, SNK WAS AND IS SO MUCH MORE. SO WITHOUT FURTHER ADO, HERE'S AN SNK FEATURE THAT MENTIONS NONE OF THE ABOVE. WHAT DO YOU MEAN WE ALREADY HAVE?

IN BRIEF

Initially formed in 1978 by Eikichi Kawasaki, SNK first entered the videogames market with two arcade titles: *Ozma Wars* and *Safari Rally*. It found huge success with scrolling shoot-'em-up *Vanguard* and later entered the console market with the likes of the Neo-Geo AES and Neo-Geo Pocket. Despite having massive success in the mid Nineties with the likes of *Metal Slug* and *The King Of Fighters* franchises, the company closed in 2000, only to be resurrected as Playmore by Kawasaki.

SNK (Shin Nihon Kikaku) exploded onto the gaming scene in the early Eighties. Its rise to prominence and subsequent fall, which was then followed by a dramatic and unexpected rebirth, is so much more than just a company history. By chronicling SNK a picture emerges of the games industry and its nuances for the last quarter of a century; indigenous and regional differences that still exist today are prominent while demonstrating that innovation was never a guarantee for success.

Japan, America and the United Kingdom have always been gaming superpowers. The US nurtured Atari – the pioneer of videogames through the Seventies and early Eighties – allowing a company to become an industry, while Apple, Commodore and Texas Instruments bolstered America's armoury as the onslaught into homes and arcades started to gather pace.

In the United Kingdom software and hardware innovation was driven by the likes of Sir Clive Sinclair, Ian Livingstone, the Stamper brothers, and even the BBC and British Telecom were founding driving forces. With their gaze and application fixed solely on software and hardware for the home markets, they planted the seeds and reaped the rewards as they marched into, and eventually conquered Europe.

In Japan things couldn't have been more different. Home software development was rare and home hardware manufacture even more so. From the very early years it was only Toshiba's MSX computer range that had any quantifiable success. Nintendo had its Game & Watch handhelds and Bandai's tabletop machines ruled game stores. But it was the arcades that the Japanese designers chose as the stage to enthral the masses. Taito and Namco had given the world *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* – two of the biggest games of



all time. In Japan it seemed that anyone involved in arcade production at the time could make successful arcade games.

By the late Seventies, SNK, the embodiment of an idea by Eikichi Kawasaki, was already in the software and hardware business, albeit far removed from the part of the industry that was responsible for the growth in arcade machines. Formed in July 1978, SNK hailed from Osaka, creating hardware and business solutions for corporate clients. After witnessing the success of Namco and Taito, Kawasaki further expanded SNK by offering the design, development and marketing of standalone coin-operated cabinets to its core business.

IN 1979 SNK readied and released two games from its new arcade arm into Japanese arcades. Both games would share Taito's 8080 hardware, which had hosted the unstoppable *Space Invaders* the year before. The first release, *Ozma Wars*, would become indicative of SNK's success and struggles for years to come. A vertical shooter, the game substituted lives for a health bar (a gaming first) and played out over different levels (another first), aliens were replaced with comets, asteroids and UFOs, and at the end of certain waves the player's craft would dock with a mother ship to replenish its health (you guessed it, another first). The second title, *Safari Hunt* was a peculiar mix of a maze game and a driving game, which in truth was too evolved for a then-primitive gaming public. Avoiding cars and navigating a maze was the game's main prerequisite and score was amassed by killing animals. Both games received modest but steady returns from the arcades, instantly finding a home with gamers who were looking for something a little different from the norm. Unfortunately, these machines and their monochrome displays aged prematurely as Taito launched *Space Invaders 2* in late 1979. Arcades became bathed in colour; monochrome games had had their day and revenues dropped accordingly.

SNK responded with 1980's colourful *Sazuke Vs. Commander*, a surprisingly simple fighter that fell some way short of SNK's earlier endeavours. It generated moderate revenue in the arcades, but it was SNK's next in-house project that would bring the company massive success and see it evolve into an arcade force.

Undeterred by moderate revenues and learning fast about the fledgling arcade industry, its consumers and their tastes, Kawasaki went back to the drawing board to sketch out the blueprint for a game that would become the embodiment of all he had learned over the previous 18 months and would subsequently begin a genre – *Vanguard*.

Released in Japan so late in 1980 it was almost 1981, *Vanguard* was a side-scrolling shooter that would become the genesis later that year to Konami's *Scramble*, and could arguably be called the forerunner to the *Gradius* series. Easy to write off today as a vintage curiosity, *Vanguard* was a measured and well-realised success for SNK. The music that played out over the attract mode was taken from John Williams' theme to *Star Trek The Motion Picture* – one of that year's must-see films – and power-ups were scored to Vulcan's theme from that year's *Flash Gordon* movie. Digitised voices provided introductions to each level, and the game itself mesmerised gamers with its flamboyant use of colour to depict the game world, four-way fire and power-ups. More importantly to gamers though, it was the first time that a game had allowed progress to be measured by distance as well as score, a game with a mission statement and a visible end. For SNK its first arcade smash would prove so popular that its entire business would change.

By looking at Japanese consumers' pastimes away from gaming, Kawasaki soon realised where gaming should have an interface into other mediums. This worked well with

UNIVERSALLY GIFTED

Paul Jacobs joined SNK in 1985. His enthusiasm for the industry was dented during his time at Universal, as various political instigators within the entertainment divisions vied for dominance. This, and Universal's court battles, put so many demands on his time that he felt he was becoming removed from the business he loved – games. Unlike his peers, as the industry crashed he resolved to remain, only for Universal to announce that despite success in the arcades it would progress the winding down and eventual closure of gaming operations.

Despite early reservations about SNK, "On paper they looked viable, but at the time they looked so overstretched," he told *Replay* magazine in an interview during 1986. "It was meeting Kawasaki that won me over, he was so enthused about the game industry and believed SNK would be world leaders, at the end of our first meeting I believed it to." Jacobs proved invaluable to SNK with his contacts in the States and Europe; it was this relationship that paved the way for SNK in the US, and the eventual souring of this relationship that would cause chaos and end one of SNK's greatest opportunities.

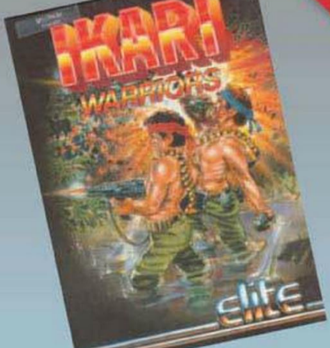




» While SNK tended to re-use the same MVS cabinets, the lightgun using *Beast Busters* required additional hardware.

» By 1986 games were getting heavier. While *Time Soldier* was an arcade smash, symptomatic with SNK of the time, it did nothing in the home market.

» *Main Event* was an early boxing game. Luckily, better beat-'em-ups were to follow.



Vanguard in the home market, but it wasn't until Centruri bought the licence for North America distribution rights that the global ratification of this ideal was realised.

Debuting in 1981 on US shores, *Vanguard* was an immediate success. So much so that Centuri's initial revenue forecasts for the year were met within a month. Such was the success that Centuri found it difficult to manufacture enough machines and so SNK started to manufacture and distribute the game itself in North America.

By late 1981 Atari executives, impressed by *Vanguard*'s impact, licensed it for use on all of its home systems, which at the time were the number one entertainment systems in the States. Despite only licensing the game to Atari and not having any direct input into the translations, the revenue generated here would secure SNK's future for a long time to come – *Vanguard* itself would go on to dominate the game charts, and it would be this income that would see SNK through the games crash of the early Eighties.

Evolving the business again, Kawasaki set about creating a US division of SNK and in October 1981 SNK Of America Corporation was born, based in Sunny Dale California. Kawasaki appointed John Rowe to head up the operation. SNK of America would distribute SNK arcade cabinets throughout the US, and feedback cultural nuances and trends to Japan allowing the rapidly expanding SNK to develop and licence games that were relevant to global consumer tastes.

SNK Japan and America combined to bring to market 20 arcade machines by the end of 1984. Varying in quality and with no discernable hallmarks, these games stood as individual pieces of artistry but did little to help gamers see SNK as a brand. Even 1984's *Vanguard 2* had little to set it apart from other games – visually it looked like a recreation of Namco's *Xevious* and gamers weren't impressed.

Incomes were slowing as the arcade marketplace became less prevalent in youth culture, forcing many arcades out of business and those that remained demanded higher returns from cabinets. It was becoming almost impossible to drive a business forward through arcade revenues alone. Kawasaki looked to Europe and the boom in 8-bit computers; videogaming was massive in Europe, despite the crash in America. Kids in Europe were playing more games than ever, but they weren't playing them in arcades; they were playing them across a myriad of home systems. At that time though, Europe's home computer market was fragmented and many popular systems were looking tired; to Kawasaki at least, the European gaming scene looked like the US gaming scene prior to its crash. The decision was therefore made to only licence games in Europe outside of the arcades. SNK Japan had to find a way of driving SNK forward without Europe.

Nintendo was readying the Famicom for a US release; Kawasaki was so impressed with the machine that he created a second SNK arm in America, this time called SNK Home Entertainment, which would enable SNK to become a third-party developer. SNK could now put its games into kids' homes across Japan and the US, on Kawasaki's own terms.

Things didn't go well at first, as John Rowe announced that he was leaving SNK to found Tradewest. Losing a key figure in their business, SNK Japan suddenly had a major problem. Both of its American companies were leaderless and as a consequence, were unproductive. SNK Japan had to find the right person and they had to find them fast. Enter Paul Jacobs.

Jacobs, who had been presiding over Universal's arcade division up until the games crash of 1983, had left Universal in 1984 after the company announced that it would begin to wind up its arcade division. Jacobs was part of the company that had not only brought *Space Panic*, the first platform

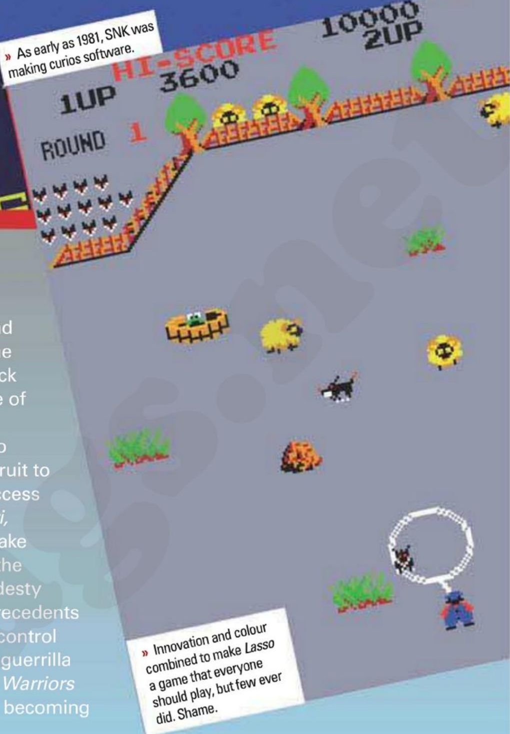
IT'S ALL IN THE NAME...

Throughout the Eighties SNK created over 40 titles for the arcade. Despite varying degrees of success, all the games were hallmarked with a standard that made them stand out. Key to the SNK business model were complicated licensing agreements, which provided SNK with a risk-free way of transposing its games into new markets, but it also created a branding issue. It wasn't unusual for gamers to play an SNK game and think that it was by Tradewest or indeed Romstar, even today it is common misconception that *Vanguard* was made by Atari. Then there was Elite who would win many accolades for *Ikari Warriors*, not as a conversion but as a standalone game. As the Nineties approached SNK would resolve to remedy this situation in ways not seen before or since.



» This isometric shooter was insanely popular throughout the Japanese and US arcades.

» As early as 1981, SNK was making curios software.



» Innovation and colour combined to make *Lasso* a game that everyone should play, but few ever did. Shame.

game, and *Mr Do!,* the biggest arcade game of 1982, to the arcade masses but more significantly had acted in a consultant role on Universal's laser disc technology.

The idea of which was to create a universal cabinet that just required a disc change to install a new game. This pioneering thinking wasn't lost on Kawasaki – a hardware technologist and businessman himself, he understood perfectly the benefits of a system such as this. Somewhat surprisingly, the concept found itself put on hold for almost a decade as Kawasaki focused the companies' energies on the US and Japanese arcade markets, while using licensing to develop SNK into a global brand in the home market.

Suitably impressed by Jacobs, Kawasaki and the now-burgeoning SNK Japan decided that he had the experience and industry knowledge to be able to run both arms of its American business independently of Japan, allowing the fast becoming giant Japanese company to focus its attentions solely on arcade hardware.

This arrangement would deliver SNK onto the world stage once and for all; everything was in place for the company to compete with Taito, Konami and Capcom for an arcade foothold, but for the first time SNK had a real advantage. America was the world's foremost purveyor of culture in the Eighties, and by having a US arm, SNK could tailor its arcade development to current US trends, helping SNK deliver relevance to the huge US market. This also meant that by the time a trend hit Japan and Europe, SNK already had a game that ticked many boxes of the gamer's psyche, effectively piggybacking other media. As far as games were concerned, SNK was the new black.

It was 1986, however, that saw the realisation of Kawasaki's dream of continuity between cultures. Movies like *Commando* and *Rambo II* were touching a nerve with moviegoers everywhere and Paul Hardcastle's *19* was dominating European music charts – war and muscle-bound hulks with guns were vogue. Hollywood had the iconic movies of war; Europe had the soundtrack to war. Japan had SNK, and SNK had the game of war, *Ikari Warriors*.

Produced in-house at SNK Japan by Keiko Ijo – then a recent technology student and new recruit to SNK Japan – few would have predicted the success of her first game. When asked today about *Ikari,* Keiko is almost dismissive: "I just wanted to make a game that had half-dressed men walking up the screen, shooting things," she says. Keiko's modesty and good humour cannot disguise the many precedents that were set by *Ikari*. Allowing players to take control of Ralf Jones and Clark Steel, the jungle-based guerrilla warfare entranced players the world over. *Ikari Warriors* was undoubtedly SNK's tentative step towards becoming hardcore and was an absolute smash.

Looking beyond the game, *Ikari* illuminated a new SNK. Two versions of *Ikari* were launched for the arcade: the standard SNK board would power the games built in Japan, while the JAMMA version was licensed to Tradewest as a conversion system, replete with 12-way directional pad

"SETTING UP AN AMERICAN ARM DELIVERED SNK ONTO THE WORLD STAGE ONCE AND FOR ALL… SNK WAS THE NEW BLACK"



Vanguard's sequel had little in common with the original, choosing instead to mimic Namco's *Xevious*.



Satan Of Saturn was vibrant and intense.





Guerrilla War in all its glory.



SNK AND CAPCOM KISSING IN A TREE

SNK and Capcom have been regarded as bedfellows since the early Nineties, but their output was much more similar in the Eighties: SNK released *Alpha Mission* to be followed some months later by *1942*, Capcom released *Commando* to be followed by *Time Soldier*. This wasn't plagiarism, however; both SNK and Capcom had massive respect for each other. Kawasaki tells us that, "We have a very good business relationship with Capcom. Some employees often go to dinner or drink together. Almost all of the Japanese Game manufacturers HQs are located in Tokyo, but SNK & Capcom HQ are located in Osaka." The local rivalries of both companies pushed Japanese gaming forward. The Nineties were shaping up to be a real Golden era.

converters that would allow old cabinets to house the game and its control mechanism of joystick, paddle and Fire button.

With interest from Europe Kawasaki took the advice of Jacobs and started a bidding war for the home licences. Elite would bring the game to Europe on all major 8-bit and 16-bit formats, and indeed even published on some formats outside of Europe. The real shock of this bidding war, though, was that Tradewest was only given rights to produce the US CBM 64 version of *Ikari*. Although Tradewest got to market two full years before Elite, SNK prevented it from distributing outside of America.

The lucrative NES licence was handed to Micronics, a small US developer whose business was run solely as a conversion agent for arcade software houses. Unaccredited on many of its works, Micronics fitted SNK perfectly – an arcade smash on the biggest system in America still carrying the SNK brand. While it may have seemed at the time that the Tradewest snub was petty, the truth was that despite sustained success and countless hit games, SNK was still largely unknown outside of Japan. Most gamers knew *Ikari*, but few could tell you who had made it, and even if they could they couldn't have accurately described SNK, its origin or IP. SNK was becoming so entrenched in American culture, its games were starting to feel as American as apple pie and Chrysler. The company that had been made famous by Atari and had seen Tradewest artwork adorn its arcade cabinets wanted its identity back; the SNK team wanted gamers to know who they were and where they were from. Over the following decade it would be this same desire that would hold SNK back and prevent the company from ever becoming a true world force. More of that later, though.

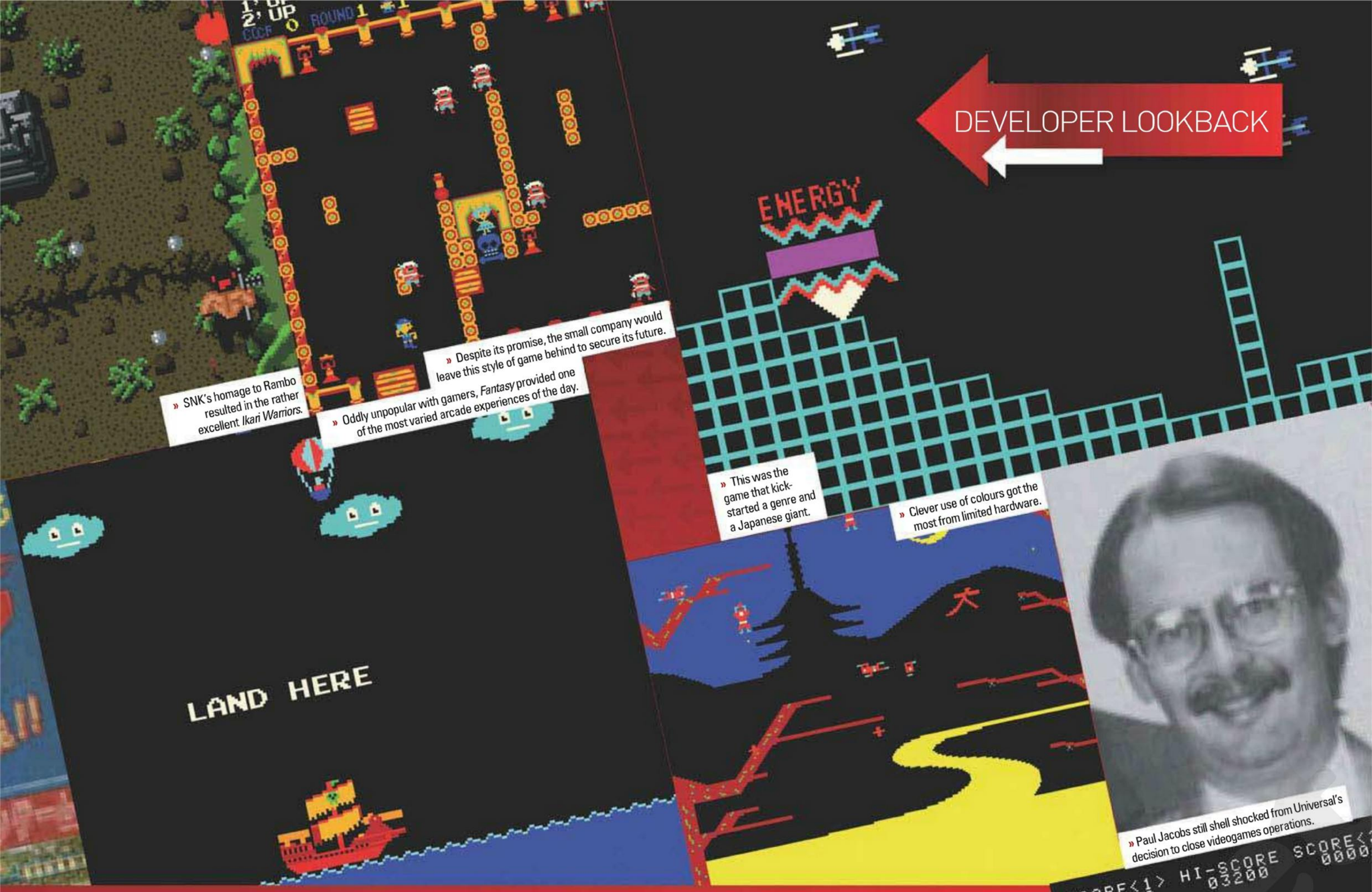
Victory Road the sequel to *Ikari Warriors* was released late in 1986, this time only on a JAMMA board; a popular sequel, it garnered a huge fan base and a bidding war ensued again. Data East would publish for the US CBM 64 only, under its auspice of Quicksilver, while the NES versions were handed to Takahito Yasuki's Romstar. Primarily a distribution company, it had recently incorporated Micronics. Kawasaki knew Yasuki from his time at Taito; they shared a love of hardware and it was Yasuki that had recommended the use of Taito boards to kick-start SNK's development. Jacobs too had imminent respect for Yasuki, siting him as, "the only competitor I feared at Universal." Theirs was now an easy alliance.

In 1987 *Athena*, *Alpha Mission* and *Ikari Warriors* all received their NES debuts; each title was a runaway smash hit, dominating sales charts across the world. Another two *Ikari* games would follow, each with similar success. SNK carried on its arcade business as usual, while Romstar converted the latest titles to the NES.

By the end of 1987 *Ikari Warriors* had been converted to ten formats, and still hadn't received a European release; while this may have frustrated other companies, SNK viewed this as a way of prolonging the shelf life of a product. The home market was far removed from the arcade business SNK had cut its teeth on where a game could burn brightly for six months, and burn out in seven.

Kawasaki knew that the NES, despite being a runaway success in the US and Japan, was having a much tougher time in Europe. Such was his belief in the hardware, he had countered this in a shrewd licensing agreement with Elite that stated that they could only develop games for computers, not consoles, so when the user base was sufficient, SNK would release the game through Romstar to Europe.

Kawasaki and Jacobs saw conversions as the way forward, and not just for home formats. They understood the arcade business too; SNK had significantly reduced costs with *Ikari 2*



» SNK's homage to Rambo resulted in the rather excellent *Ikari Warriors*.

» Despite its promise, the small company would leave this style of game behind to secure its future.

» Oddly unpopular with gamers, *Fantasy* provided one of the most varied arcade experiences of the day.

» This was the game that kick-started a genre and a Japanese giant.

» Clever use of colours got the most from limited hardware.

» Paul Jacobs still shell shocked from Universal's decision to close videogames operations.



» The attack waves were a welcome change to the unified marching of *Space Invaders*.

and operators loved it. Now there was an opportunity to make Universal's failed Multi Game system ideal a reality.

The MVS system was developed throughout 1988; while the hardware division worked on prototype designs, game output slowed, in readiness. During the downtime a select group of programmers, including Keiko Ijo, would work on two NES specific videogames, while helping out with the four launch games for MVS.

In 1989, *Baseball Stars* was released on the NES. Baseball was almost becoming Japan's national sport at the time, and already dominated American lives. It wasn't a straightforward baseball game either; rich in the nuances of the game, it also featured team management and rosters – a first for an action-led sports title – and its success was assured. The second game, that languished in development much longer than SNK was used to a at that point, was *Crystalis* (*God Slayer* in Japan). Almost two years in development, it didn't arrive until early 1990; it had the distinction of upsetting Nintendo and wowing all that played it. For one of the few times in its history, Nintendo was upstaged on its own console. Similar in many ways to Nintendo's *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Crystalis* was adult-themed and dark, containing inspired cut-scenes and a massive game world. *Crystalis* became so potent that Nintendo started to re-advertise *Zelda* in some areas to relight sales, damaging the poignancy and financial potential of what was and still is the better game.

More significantly for SNK though, 1989 would see the release of the Multi Video System. An arcade cabinet that could hold between one and six arcade games. The games would be stored in cartridge format, and swapped by the arcade operator in much the same way as a modern console works. Neal Zook, who at the time was SNK's resident designer, had created the cabinet to be changeable, so in the event of a new game being applied, the arcade operator could switch the tiles and artwork of the cabinet in a matter of minutes to create the effect of a standalone cabinet. It cost less than half the price of a traditional cabinet and games could be bought for less than half that price again. Arcade owners loved it and so did the gamers; the first four releases *Magician Lord*, *Nam 75*, *Baseball Stars Professional* and *Top Players Golf* all offered the videogaming pinnacle of their relative genres. With unrivalled processing power, and dedicated chips for sprites, scaling and sound, the MVS was a potent force.

A meeting between Kawasaki and Jacobs in mid-1989 would see SNK evolve again. As the decade of SNK's unbridled success drew to a close, Sega released the Genesis (purportedly to be the Sega arcade experience at home), Hudson and NEC finally released the oft delayed Turbo Grafx-16, and Nintendo had announced that the SNES would replace the rapidly aging NES.

For SNK to support any one machine exclusively would make little sense at this point; focus would for now return once again to the arcade, where SNK was the hardware king – Takara and Romstar could worry about the home conversions. Kawasaki and Jacobs had other plans…

The second part of our SNK trilogy continues on page 204.

Thanks to the lovely Killer List of Videogames for several images.

"CRYSTALIS HAD THE DISTINCTION OF UPSETTING NINTENDO AND WOWING ALL THAT PLAYED IT"

THE CLASSIC GAME

ZILLION

Compared to the big three 8-bit home-micros, and also Nintendo's NES, Sega's Master System, which is from the same era, may seem a little underloved. But we are determined to champion the machine's best games. Zillion was hailed as a classic by all those who played it – if only more people had played on a Master System!

IN THE KNOW



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3

The Master System, much like the Game Boy, is not a machine that is easy to choose Classic Game coverage from. There are countless titles, of course, but it's always the same few that are mentioned again and again. Furthermore, considering the dominance of other companies' hardware at the time, even if a third of all Sega Master System owners hailed a single game as the greatest on their machine (a one-to-three attachment ratio being nearly unprecedented), that number of people would still be comparatively far lower than even those praising an average-selling NES game, for example. This has resulted in several great Sega Master System games being doomed to anonymity amongst the masses simply because not enough people owned the native hardware originally. Unless you were part of the secret club of Master System owners, and also lucky enough to have *Zillion*, you won't realise that it's a classic game.

Looking at the drab cover art, featuring a computer monitor, you wouldn't think it, but *Zillion* was a revelation compared to the mostly simplistic titles released alongside, and is also the antithesis to the hand-holding of modern titles. It sits in that strange region of gaming we remember fondly, as something that broke new grounds, but due to the current climate will never be made in quite the same way again. When starting you're introduced to ten symbols that need to be inputted at computer terminals throughout the game. Typing four of the same symbol results in a specific reaction but costs one ID card (shutting off laser barriers and gun turrets, activating warps, etc), while opening doors requires a combination of four symbols, but doesn't use up cards. These ID cards need to be scavenged from item pods found in each room, and are of a limited supply, while the pass codes for doors are randomly generated – they are only revealed, individually, from certain item pods in the specific rooms.

It's not an easy dynamic to explain, but the result is a game that respects the player and assumes they have intelligence. While a modern action/adventure title will keep lists of learnt things, requiring only a menu selection to activate, *Zillion* forces you to write everything down, as you're playing, and thanks to the randomisation of door codes, each and every time you play. It might not sound compelling, but it heightens the atmosphere and also satisfaction of solving things.

Then there's the *Metroid* connection (we mean the first *Metroid*, released in 1986). *Zillion* requires the accumulation of ID cards, levelling and weapon increasing power-ups, items that improve vision, plus two additional characters with their



» Opa-opa (from *Fantasy Zone*) makes an appearance as an item that levels you up. Here we also see life-restoring bread, and the gun power-up.

ZILLION SITS IN THAT STRANGE REGION OF SOMETHING THAT BROKE NEW GROUNDS, BUT DUE TO THE CURRENT CLIMATE WILL NEVER BE MADE IN QUITE THE SAME WAY AGAIN

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FANTASY ZONE
SNES
1986

PHANTASY STAR (PICTURED)
SEGA MASTER SYSTEM
1987

WONDER BOY III: THE DRAGON'S TRAP
SMS
1989



own particular traits. Gradually these characters increase in power, enabling them to see where traps are, take more damage, and also fire the more powerful blasts. The sense of accomplishment when levelling up energy or your Zillion Blaster weapon, thereby allowing stronger capsules to be broken into and the game to progress further, is exactly as it is in *Metroid*. Every success feels like a triumphant victory over some unseen and antagonistic agent (in this case, the brains of Kotaro Hayashida, the game's main planner). *Zillion* also features a single, massive, retraceable, maze-like map that is slowly explored. Most strikingly, this reveals the same predilection for lengthy vertical passages (including elevators) interspersed with lengthy horizontal tunnels. The *Metroid* similarities are unmistakable, but maybe it's too easy to make comparisons only to *Metroid*, since *Zillion* perhaps also shares an equal amount of binary DNA with *Impossible Mission*. There are the same elevator shafts and tunnels, plus rooms which require the examining of various fixtures (item pods, as opposed to furniture), and also the need to assemble separate pieces of code.

While it is very much like the two aforementioned games, enough to entice fans to check it out, *Zillion* is also entirely unlike them when it comes to styling and atmosphere. It is a rare title that despite clearly borrowing ideas from elsewhere, still manages to make itself unique. The opening is atop a green planet surface besieged by *Terminator*-esque cyborgs, and there is much excitement had battling past them to reach the one elevator which travels beneath the surface. There's also some expertly placed tension since, for example, disabling a laser forcefield is only temporary; if you don't rush past when it's down, grab what you need and then get out immediately, you will lose much health and perhaps even die. Elevators meanwhile are loose fitting affairs, with no precise placement for stopping – allowing one to be lowered to just below the enemies' line of fire, before shooting back with impunity. While at first enemies can only shoot standing up, later foes do so while lying down and also upwards (making for some tense encounters). The goal is to eventually find five incredibly well-hidden floppy disks, containing some kind of top secret data, input a detonation code to destroy the alien base, before finally making your escape.

As no doubt shown, it's a difficult game that requires patience, thinking, and also dexterity – but mainly patience. In truth, it's likely that few had the necessary skills back in the day to complete it, especially with no save ability and guides only being available through magazines, but once you've absorbed and fully understood the code system in place, it is a joy to play even if you don't actually reach the end.



» This is a good screen: both side-characters rescued, a healthy stockpile of ID cards, plus two out of the five floppy disks found.



» This secret room can be found by venturing back inside the opening spacecraft.



» Once you've rescued Champ, the game's difficulty ramps up even further. There are cyborgs and auto-guns everywhere. It's gonna be tough.

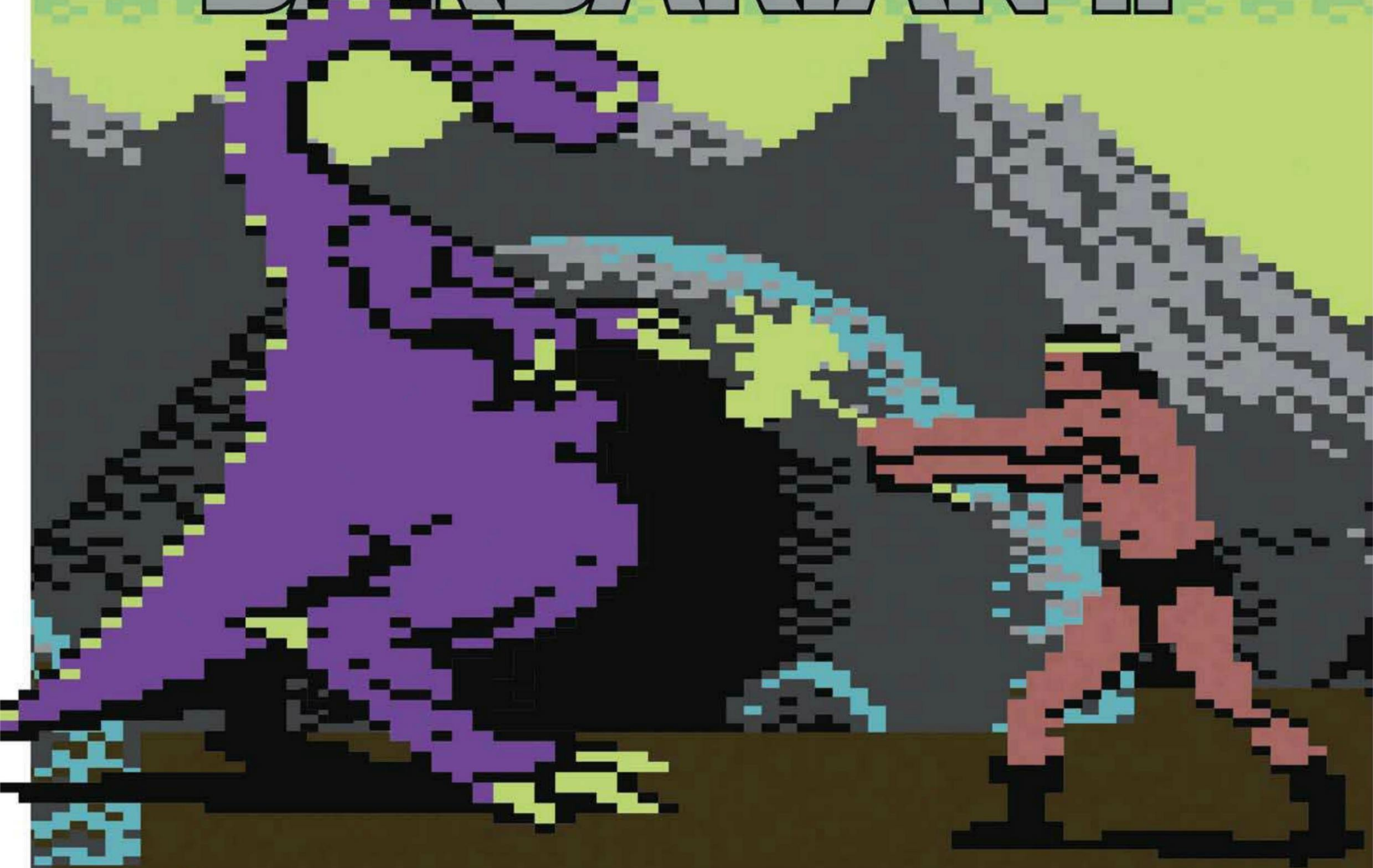
ORIGINS AND FOLLOW-UPS

Contrary to what many incorrect online sources say, the first *Zillion* SMS title was not developed by Tatsunoko Production. Tatsunoko Production in fact created the original anime TV series (31 episodes, running at 30 minutes each), and later an *OVA* movie. The overall storyline involved the genocide of humanity by aliens and three teenagers wielding the titular Zillion weapons, who all stand against this. The two games (since there was a sequel), were actually developed by Sega. The mistake comes from Tatsunoko Production's name being first on the title screen, but some quick cross-referencing proves that all those who worked on the first *Zillion*, were also employed by Sega on several other in-house titles (including the renowned Tokuhiko Uwabo, who did the music for *Phantasy Star IV*). Case closed.



THE MAKING OF...

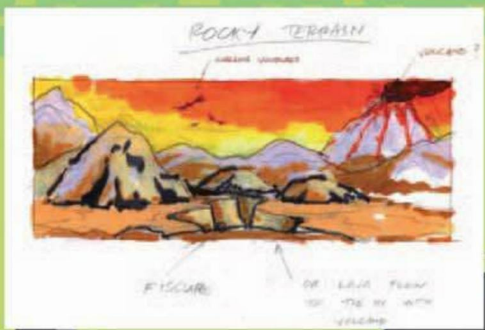
BARBARIAN AND BARBARIAN II



During a time when the most popular beat-'em-ups were good-natured, honourable karate games, Barbarian grabbed the headlines, offering gore, decapitated heads flying through the air and a suitably controversial advertising campaign. Designer Steve Brown grabs an axe and chats to Craig Grannell about Palace's classic brawler and its audience-polarising sequel.



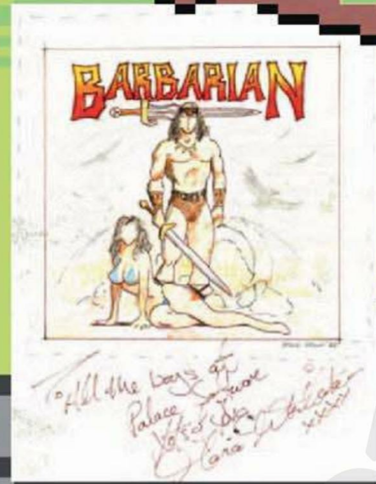
"I LOVED BRINGING TO LIFE THE VARIOUS FIGHTING MOVES AND MONSTERS – AND, OF COURSE, TAKING MOULDS OF MARIA WHITTAKER, SO THAT I COULD SCULPT AND CAST HER CUSTOM BREAST PLATES..." STEVE BROWN



» Some early concept art from *Barbarian II.*



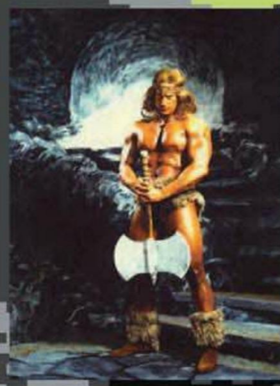
» Hello Palace. Princess Leia wants her gold bikini back.



» There seemed to be little point in finishing off Whittaker's face. After all, no one was going to be looking at it...



» The *Barbarian* version of *Match Of The Day* was somewhat lacking in tact.



» Steve on then unknown bodybuilder Michael Van Wijk: "He was a sweet guy and had very short hair. I worked hard to make him look ferocious – these shots got him the *Gladiators* gig, and the scowl/long hair became his trademark."

In the mid Eighties, fighting games were generally honourable fare. The rather forced gore of *Mortal Kombat* was over half a decade away, and small-screen gamers were still reeling from Melbourne House's *Way Of The Exploding Fist*, with its realistic graphics and crunching gameplay. But at Palace, Steve Brown was planning to turn the genre on its head, forming a blueprint for games that followed and considerably upping the ante regarding on-screen violence on home computers. "After working on the two *Cauldron* games, I was a bit fed up with tiny on-screen characters. I wanted to come up with something meaty – the sort of game that I wanted to play, but that no one had done yet," recalls Steve. "I was a big fan of the *Conan* novels, particularly the *Savage Sword Of Conan* comic magazines, which were full of hacking and slaying! I'd enjoyed *Exploding Fist*, and thought it'd be great to work on the ultimate sword-fighting game."

Along with feeding into Steve's personal tastes, *Barbarian* also met with Palace Software's approval. Although beat-'em-ups were fast becoming commonplace – even old hat – *Barbarian* was a new twist on the genre, rather than more of the same, and Palace Software was always keen to work on something that hadn't been done before.

SWORD AND SORCERY

Coming up with a plot to hang the game from came easily to Steve. It centres on the evil sorcerer Drax, who swore to wreak doom on the people of the jewelled city unless Princess Mariana was delivered to him. His sole caveat: she will be freed if a champion can be found who's able to defeat Drax's guardians. All is lost until an unknown warrior appears from the forgotten wastelands of the north. It's all pretty cheesy and clichéd, but, as Steve says, that's part of the game's charm. "The story is just your basic sword and sorcery riff: take a princess, an evil wizard, a disgusting henchman, and so on, and the same is true of the character design – it's all very *Conan*-esque."

However, Conan media did more than inform the game's backstory and look – it also directly influenced the most important aspect of *Barbarian*: the combat moves. "Being a big *Conan* fan, I had a pretty good idea of which sword-fighting moves would be cool in a game," says Steve. Wanting the gameplay to look and feel as realistic as

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1987-9
» **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP/ARCADE ADVENTURE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

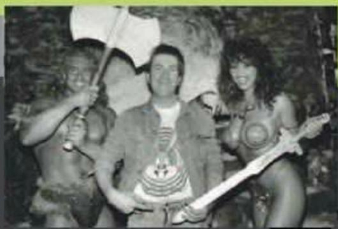
CAULDRON
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986

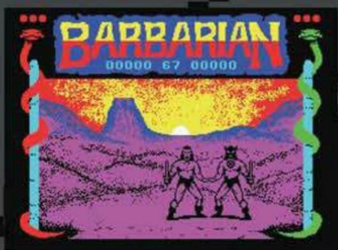
RIMRUNNER
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, C64
YEAR: 1988

THE MAKING OF...

BARBARIAN 1 & II



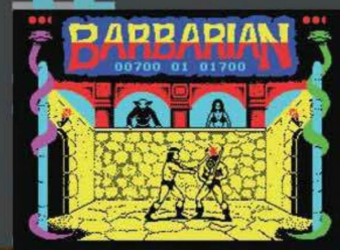
» Steve having a bit of fun on *Barbarian's* photoshoot with Maria Whittaker and Michael Van Wijk.



» Taking a cue from Mary Whitehouse, the monochrome barbarians decided to renounce violence and just hold hands.



» The barbarian's kneecapping technique was nasty enough to make a hardened East End gangster shudder.



» You know a team's dedicated to its cause when even otherwise monochrome graphics have a gore injection!



OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

If there's one thing that has remained in people's minds about *Barbarian*, it's the flying neck chop – when your timing is spot-on, your barbarian spins through the air, his sword bringing a swift end to the current bout as it separates his opponent's head from his neck. "I desperately wanted a killer decapitation move in the game, and leaping through the air seemed to fit the bill," explains Steve. But what of the green goblin that shuffles on screen to unceremoniously boot the head out of sight, before dragging the headless corpse away? "Once we'd added the head-chop move, I felt it was a bit of a let-down for the head to just disappear before the next fight," recalls Steve. "Then it suddenly came to me – I thought it would be hysterically funny if a little green orc came along and booted the head away. That's just the way my mind works, I'm afraid!"



possible, Steve asked his girlfriend's father to fashion some wooden swords. Steve then roped in assistant animator Gary Carr, and the pair of them started practising like crazy in front of a video camera until they got the moves right: "We both got pretty banged up, but we actually learned how to do everything that Schwarzenegger did in the movie, including the 'web of death', where the sword is twirled behind the barbarian's back!" In addition to this great-looking attack, standard 'swiping' moves are on offer, along with a powerful overhead chop. In a nod to *Exploding Fist*'s success in combining offence and defence, several blocking moves were also integrated, adding a layer of strategy to the proceedings, rather than each battle deteriorating into a free-for-all hack-fest. However, perhaps the best inclusion – and certainly the most memorable – is *Barbarian*'s flying neck chop (see 'Off with his head!'), a move that made the devastation felt upon mastering *Exploding Fist*'s flying kick seem weedy and tame by comparison.

With the moves decided on and plenty of reference material now available – albeit reference of designers jumping around, fighting with wooden swords, rather than actual barbarians doing their thing – Steve got to work tracing key poses and using them as the basis for the barbarian's animation frames on the computer. For Steve, this process was one of the real highlights of working on *Barbarian*: "I've so many good memories of working on that game, but the best were learning the sword-fighting moves with Gary and then seeing them come to life in the game – that was magic!" However, like any good fighting game, just having a selection of interesting moves isn't enough – as with Melbourne House's *Exploding Fist*, it was essential that *Barbarian*'s control method be intuitive, rather than forcing gamers to regularly consult the manual; therefore, great care was taken when deciding on each move's position on the joystick. Without the fire button being pressed, the barbarian has defensive moves at his disposal (jump, crouch, roll, and two blocking positions with the sword, to protect his head and body); with the fire button used, six offensive sword attacks are on offer, along with two close-combat body moves – a kick and a meaty head-butt.

"I'VE SO MANY GOOD MEMORIES OF WORKING ON BARBARIAN, BUT THE BEST WERE LEARNING THE SWORD-FIGHTING MOVES AND THEN SEEING THEM COME TO LIFE IN THE GAME – THAT WAS MAGIC!"
STEVE BROWN

SOLO SWORDPLAY

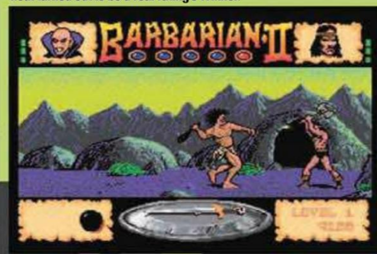
"Next, we got the collision detection up and running," says Steve. "This enabled us to test the game in two-player mode to make sure it all worked and – most importantly – that it was fun." The main challenge to the team from that point on was in coming up with a system of responses for the computer opponent



» By being able to chop off heads on his own, the orc's productivity increased 100 per cent.



» Step-by-step drawings of one of *Barbarian II*'s many gory death sequences. Note the black humour in the bottom two sketches.



» *Come Dancing*'s 'camp neanderthal and barbarian disco dancing' heat turned out to be a real rating's winner.



that, in Steve's words, "didn't suck and that wasn't totally predictable." With the majority of games in the genre falling foul to the 'unbeatable move syndrome', this level of unpredictability was of paramount importance, in order to give the game longevity and challenge. In practice, it works well, and even low-level opponents often have tricks up their sleeves to dispatch complacent or over-confident adversaries.

With the game's AI working, *Barbarian*'s 'combat practice' mode was complete, providing a two-player challenge and a means for solo players to hone their skills before taking on the game's single-player quest. This involves venturing deep into Drax's stronghold, taking on his guardians, each one more ruthless than the last, while he and the princess look on. The challenge ends with the barbarian taking on Drax himself, the sorcerer spewing magic from his fingers. Your timing has to be spot on for you to escape death and rescue the princess from his clutches.

To complete the production, the now sadly departed musical maestro Richard Joseph was drafted in and given the task of composing a suitably epic score for what was fast becoming a filmic 8-bit experience. "Richard, as always, did a fantastic job," remembers Steve. "As a starting point, we sat down and I played him two movies that I thought had the right feel: a fab old film from 1963 about Mayans fighting native American Indians, *Kings Of The Sun*. The film had a great rhythmic battle soundtrack that had always stuck in my head. We also, of course, watched *Conan The Barbarian*! Richard then went away, worked his magic, and returned with music and effects that were spot-on!"

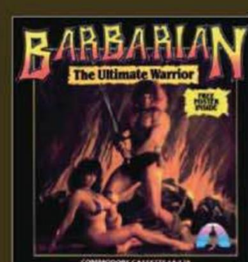
Aside from the usual bunch of do-gooder whiners (see 'A wolf in no clothing'), *Barbarian* met with an enthusiastic response from most, and many gamers were excited about seeing a company doing something different, rather than releasing yet another game of people wearing pyjamas and kicking each other in the face. "Yeah! All the thrills and spills of a nightmarish abattoir – blood spurts, decapitated heads flying around, guts and gore and hunchback cripples dragging away corpses – this is what I call a real hack-'em-up," enthused Julian Rignall, in *Zzap!64*'s July 1987 issue, where the game narrowly missed a Sizzler! award. *Commodore User* was a little more generous, with Eugene Lacey noting: "Although it's a bit sick, it has to be said *Barbarian* is a real winner," and duly awarding the game a Screen Star. Elsewhere, a *C+VG* Hit softened the blow from the game narrowly failing to Smash in *Crash*, and a year later, the Amiga version, complete with smoother animation, faster gameplay and some neat sampled sound effects, had Gary Penn positively frothing at the mouth in the Amiga section of *Commodore User*. None of this acclaim stunned Palace at the time, though. "I don't mean to sound big-headed, but I knew *Barbarian* was a good game, and I wasn't surprised that it did very well," claims Steve. "I've always had very good commercial instincts, and I made the game that I wanted to play. The cover art and gore were totally in keeping with the concept and all part of the fun. It's exactly what I would have wanted as a punter!"

THE DUNGEONS OF DRAX

With *Barbarian* having struck a chord with weary gamers, creating a sequel was a no-brainer, but as with previous Palace sequels, it was important to differentiate it from the first game. "I hate repeating ideas," says Steve. "Therefore, the challenge for us was to add features to the game and take it in a new direction." Steve started thinking about answers to the question 'How do you expand from two guys fighting each-other in an arena?', arriving at two separate conclusions: "The first answer that came to me was that we could have the barbarian move around a larger playing area; secondly, I thought we could add fantasy monsters. In the end, as was usually the case when I worked on games, I decided to go for both!"

A WOLF IN NO CLOTHING

The keen-eyed among you will spot Michael Van Wijk (*Gladiators*' Wolf) on *Barbarian*'s cover. Despite his lack of clothes, it was Maria Whittaker's Princess Mariana that courted most controversy, causing outrage at her skimpy outfit. "I'd conceived the cover imagery and undiluted violence right from the beginning as part of the whole experience," admits Steve. "I think people were blown away by the game and the publicity in equal measure." However, he does recall the game being banned for a time in Germany, and WHSmith showing its prudish side: "We had to come up with an alternative cover for *Barbarian II*, otherwise they wouldn't stock it!"



THE MAKING OF...

BARBARIAN 1 & II



» Sanding opposite a barbarian with a very sharp axe, the evil Drax wished his magic's range was a little further than six inches.



» Sadly, our hero ignored entry #671 of the Barbarian Handbook: never let a nasty green thing with a sword sneak up behind you.



» "I knew I should have emigrated with the princess," thought our hero during his swift, cowardly retreat from a tiny foe.

» Our hero liked to think his axe prowess removed the monster's head, but in reality it was his terrible body odour.



GIRL POWER

With Princess Mariana reduced to the role of eye-candy-come-captive in *Barbarian*, it's only fair that her role was expanded in the sequel. Following in the brave footsteps of the girl from *Ant Attack* and the similarly unnamed female ranger in *Park Patrol*, Mariana struck a blow for women's rights everywhere, proving she was just as capable as her male counterpart (in that she, too, could run around nearly naked and hack various monsters to bits). With numerous tiresome activists engrossed in complaining about the cover art, this little slice of gaming equality was lost to many. Still, some preferred playing as the princess – "We added the feature to accommodate gamers who wanted to get in touch with their feminine side," jokes Steve – even though it made no difference in gameplay terms, despite what some long-time fans seem to think.



And so *Barbarian II: The Dungeons of Drax* slowly came into being, following the adventures of the barbarian and Princess Mariana on their quest to rid the jewelled city once and for all of Drax's evil. Smarting from his earlier defeat, the sorcerer has fled to the safety of his castle's dungeons and vowed revenge. Playing either as the barbarian or Princess Mariana, the player must battle through three levels of increasing difficulty before facing off against two massive foes and Drax himself in the inner sanctum.

In terms of basic gameplay, the most obvious change is *Barbarian II*'s move away from linear progression. The original *Barbarian*'s quest has you moving ever onward in a straight line, but the sequel's levels are maze-like, with a compass pointing north, helping you keep track of your bearings. "It was really hard to figure out how to move around a 3D map in a 2D side-on game, and in the end there was only one workable solution, but it wasn't very elegant," admits Steve. "Another big limitation for me was in not being able to have a scrolling background – the screen-flipping spoiled the game for me."

IT'S A FUNNY OLD DEATH

Despite this setback – and anyone who's played *Barbarian II* will be pretty aware of the confusing nature of the compass, seeing as you might exit a screen on the left only to end up running right, but with the compass having turned 180 degrees – it's safe to say that the sheer variety of enemies lurking in the levels somewhat made up for it. And where there are enemies, there's scope for death gags, and Steve certainly expanded on the original *Barbarian*'s flying neck chop. In the wastelands, a sauron beast will happily bite the head off of a sluggish barbarian, enabling you to watch a head-sized lump travel down its narrow neck when it swallows, after which the beast emits a satisfied belch; in the caverns, carnivores pounce and grab unprepared barbarians, shaking them like rag dolls; and in the dungeons, the dungeon master's heart can be torn from his chest with a well-timed flying neck chop (he's rather on the tall side, see?), while a pit thing grabbing a hapless hero results in your helpless avatar being dragged downwards, eaten (complete with suitably meaty crunching noises) and a skull being spat out of the pit. "I don't know where all these ideas come from – they just pop into my head," says Steve. "The main thing is that if they make me laugh or have the 'wow' factor, I'll use them, otherwise they go in the bin. Certainly, black humour keeps things interesting, and so I wanted to push that in the sequel – the more body parts I could slice off, the better!" But after the gore of the previous effort, were the team concerned about reaction from the censors? "Well, as there were so many things in the game that could bleed, we did tone down the 'vibrancy' of the blood, to avoid problems with the more squeamish distributors," Steve admits.

It's safe to say that the scope and ambition of *Barbarian II* were both high, but the result met with a mixed reaction, not least due to the far more limited moves on offer – just four, compared to the original's eight, and there were no available defensive moves at all. "With all of the extra animation featured in the game – running, falling into pits, the monsters, and so on – there just wasn't room for the frames," explains Steve, adding that some of the original moves had to go to make room for the 'run' and 'through door' actions. Nonetheless, despite the subdued reaction from some (*Your Sinclair*'s "Slobbery follow-up to everybody's fave slash-'n'-drool game of '87" probably being the low point), *Zzap!64* still managed to get terribly excited about the game, awarding it a Gold Medal, and *Commodore User* later awarded the Amiga game a Screen Star, despite it being "undeniably 8-bit". Steve is unapologetic to the game's detractors, although he admits *Barbarian II* is not without its flaws: "The second game was a bold step in a new direction, and it was entertaining on many levels, but it didn't have the classic perfection of the first game." Once again he

» After years of working in a miserable dungeon, the keeper's heart just wasn't in it any more.



» "Pick a card, any card," said the demon, but our hero wasn't fooled. After all, there weren't any cards.



managed to have fun, though, even if his over-riding memories about the game aren't always to do with its design: "I loved bringing to life the various fighting moves and monsters – and, of course, taking moulds of Maria Whittaker, so that I could sculpt and cast her custom breast plates…"

THE FINAL CONFLICT

As seasoned fans of the game will know, the end of *Barbarian II* finds the barbarian's quest seemingly at an end when he removes Drax's head from its usual position on his shoulders. However, before our hero has a chance to rearrange his furry pants, Drax sneakily collects his bonce, replaces it and sneaks off through a portal. When the barbarian tries to follow, he is repelled, and the last we see of Drax is his fist returning to offer our hero a rather rude hand gesture. "About two-thirds of the way through *Barbarian II*, I had the incredibly 'original' idea that the series could be a trilogy," explains Steve, referring to the cliffhanger ending. "Therefore, I pulled the climactic Drax death sequence I'd planned – Drax's skin originally split apart to reveal another monster for the barbarian to fight – and let him escape through his magic mirror."

With *Barbarian II* safely in the can, Steve approached Palace's Pete Stone with a pitch for *Barbarian III: The Final Conflict*. The storyline had the barbarian and Princess Mariana tracking Drax to his final retreat, the throne room of his castle. Prior to this, there were to be three levels of weird and wonderful monsters, plentiful new traps, and new gameplay elements. "When the fourth level was reached, Drax would summon all the powers of hell and change into a huge, gross, tentacled 'penis monster'," explains Steve. "Only a skilled player who'd gone through the game successfully to this point could avoid getting eaten alive, and if Drax was defeated, the player would have been treated to an animation of the barbarian and Princess Mariana standing astride the vanquished monster, their hearts joyful, their loins ablaze with desire!"

The game was to be a combination of what Steve considered the best gameplay elements from the first two outings, but taken to new heights of black humour and animation excellence. "For example, the arcade adventure sections, although similar to *Barbarian II*, would have featured scrolling backgrounds," says Steve. Most exciting, though, were Steve's plans for combat sequences at key stages. "I wanted these to be similar to the original *Barbarian*, but with much larger figures – think *Tekken* in 2D, with swords and knives!"

Plenty of initial designs were created, along with some test animations and a sculpture of the 'penis monster'. "I also had some initial meetings with the effects shop at Pinewood Studios, to discuss having a 15-foot-long tentacle made to lift the princess into the air for a cover shoot," says Steve, noting that this was in the days before Photoshop and CGI. Unfortunately, before his plans could evolve any further, Palace folded and he never heard anything more about the project. "Shame," concludes Steve, "because it would have kicked serious arse!"

"BLACK HUMOUR KEEPS THINGS INTERESTING, AND SO I WANTED TO PUSH THAT IN THE SEQUEL – THE MORE BODY PARTS I COULD SLICE OFF, THE BETTER!"

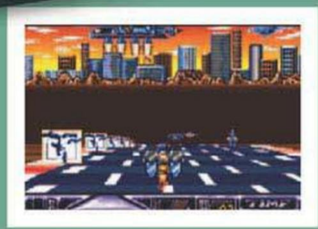
COSTUME TROUBLES

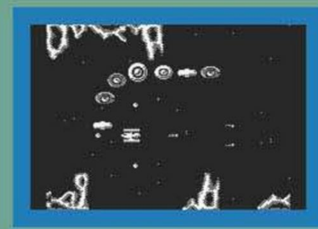
While many making ofs include harrowing tales of all-night debugging sessions, Steve recalls that he, as the designer, had, erm, 'pressing' concerns elsewhere. "For *Barbarian II*'s cover, I wanted to top the first game's costumes, and so I got Maria Whittaker in for a costume fitting," he remembers. "After she tried on some bikini-type tops, it occurred to me to sculpt some gold breast-plates, like those in exotic Frank Frazetta paintings. All I could find to make an impression of her size and shape to take home were some foil ashtrays—there were worse ways to spend an afternoon!" However, despite Steve's efforts, the flimsy chains holding Maria's plates would snap if she took a big breath. "It was like a *Carry On* movie," says Steve. "I spent plenty of time with pliers, bending the links back together!"



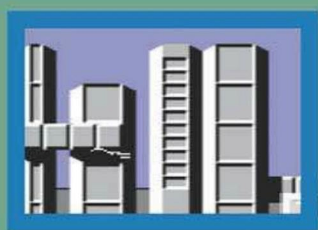
COMPANY PROFILE

THALAMUS

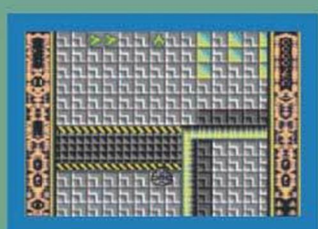
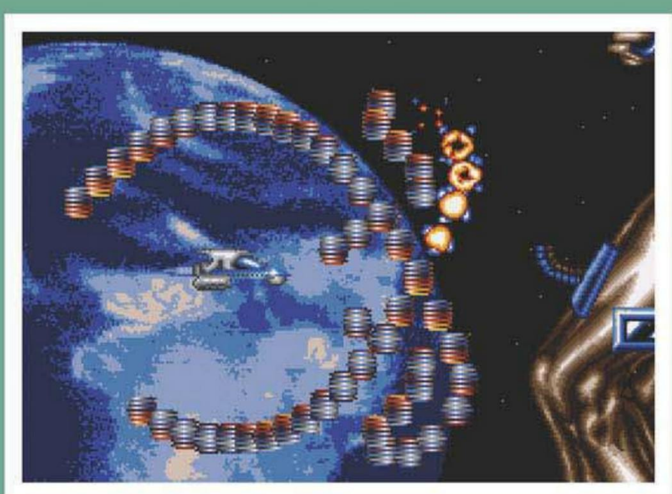





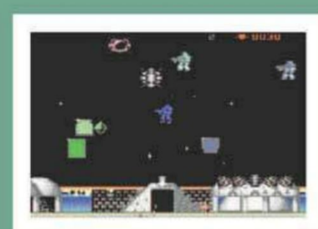
FROM ARMALYTE TO WINTER CAMP: A COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE POPULAR C64 PUBLISHER







BRAIN STRAIN

The Thalamus logo stood for quality, with the company specialising in tough shoot-'em-ups and platformers. The escalating costs of developing for new machines saw the firm close its doors after just seven short years. Andrew Fisher looks back at the diverse range of programmers and the aftermath of the company's bankruptcy…

Newsfield director Roger Kean remembers, "Visitors to the London computer game shows at Earls Court and Olympia in late 1985 to early 1986 often suggested that *Zzap!*, particularly, ought to publish games, so the pressure to do something about it came at first from the reviewers Julian Rignall and Gary Penn. In the end, it was me who finally said Newsfield could do it and found a software publishing house, and then went on to persuade the other directors. It was obvious to us that we would need to poach someone with development and marketing experience, and Andrew 'Flathead' Wright (a regular Ludlow visitor in his role as Activision's PR manager) seemed ideal and was interested."

Many in the industry had doubts about the label's independence from the magazines that would review its products. EMAP, Newsfield's main rival, was selling off its software label Beyond. Roger continues, "We rented premises in London. Admittedly, these were in the same building as the London editorial team for *LM Magazine*, but then those people had little to no interest in games or the people putting them together.


THE Thalamus Star

November 1988

FREE

ALIENS WIN THE OLYMPICS!

Amazing ARMALYTE scoops world's top awards

STOP PRESS – CORRUPTION SHOCK!

Dear Dr F…

The Thalamus Star, a response to US Gold's 'History in the Making' ads.

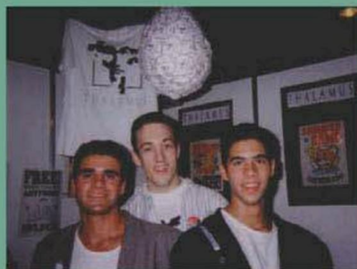
Obviously, as a wholly owned subsidiary, the Newsfield board kept tight reins on the Thalamus operation, but only from a management point of view. As to the *Zzap!* editorial people, they enjoyed no more or less advance information than they were used to getting from other developers at the time. Indeed, Gary Penn famously rubbished one Thalamus game (*Delta*) in a review."

Ex-*Zzap!* editor Gordon Houghton continues the story. "The relationship between Newsfield and Thalamus was perfectly professional, as far as I remember. They certainly didn't feel like the same company; in fact, I didn't know they were until someone told me. On an editorial level they kept the two companies quite separate. Newsfield never applied any pressure to give good marks to any game, let alone Thalamus ones. It was never even mentioned. They were quite happy as long as we could back up any rating we awarded with reasons for doing so." Gordon did come under pressure once, but more on that a little later.

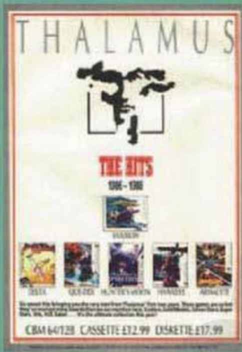
Someone else was needed to work alongside Andrew Wright though. "The other *Zzap!* staff writer, Gary Liddon, was of course a coder, and spent a lot of his spare time slogging away on a C64," continues Roger. Gary had worked at Domark before joining *Zzap!* and was more than happy to tell us how he got the Thalamus gig. "I got my place at *Zzap!* through sheer force of will and lots of enthusiasm rather than on the basis of talent," he admits. "To be honest I fitted better in game development and Thalamus was a great step into that industry. Andy Wright was a good friend who was working at Activision as a PR guy, but was really unhappy and wanted to do something else. I had a lot of time for the high-ups at Newsfield having faith in a 19-year-old and a 20-year-old to set up and run a games publisher. It's crazy on the face of it but worked out well for everyone."

THE HELSINKI HEX HERO

The fledgling company attended the 1986 PCW Show as part of the Newsfield stand. "Julian got chatting to this tall, thin streak from Finland with the unlikely Greek-sounding name Stavros Fasoulas, who had the better part of a C64 game ready," recalls Roger. "Julian kept on raving about it and invited Stavros up to Ludlow after the computer fair ended. Penn and Liddon also admired the game, while arguing that it still fell short of being a winner. Stavros himself still wanted to add a deal more complexity, a process that took a few months while he camped out in the flat Penn and Liddon shared." This flexibility on deadlines and the urge to polish a game would become a Thalamus hallmark. Gary remembers, "We offered loads of feedback to Stavros. To be honest, I think that may have been a bit of a pain in the arse for him. I later ended up a programmer and it's great getting external feedback on what you're working on; however, that feedback needs to come at the right time and place. I'm not sure how much Stavros was helped on *Delta* and *Sanxion* by a daily deluge of suggestions on what would be good in the game."


Pieter Opdam (at the back) meets John and Steve Rowlands on the Thalamus stand, PCW Show 1989 (courtesy of Jason Kelk).

Stavros called it *Rainbow Warrior* after the bonus sections, but Gary suggested changing the name after the sinking of the Greenpeace ship. So the first Thalamus release became *Sanxion*, with Jon Twiddy's Cyberload, Mat Sneap's loading screen and Rob Hubbard's soundtrack. Eager for a follow-up, work started on *Delta*, another horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up, with the backgrounds drawing inspiration from *Nemesis* and *Salamander*. Gary regards



The Hits, a great compilation of early Thalamus games.

IN THE KNOW

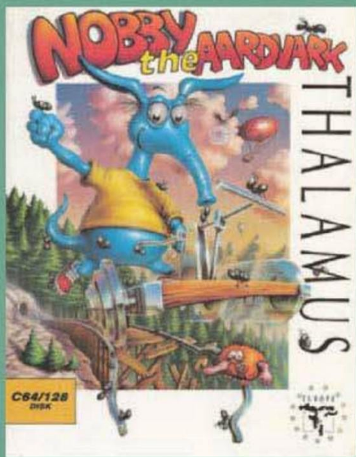
Thalamus was formed in 1986 as the software label of Newsfield, famous for its computer magazines such as *CRASH* and *Zzap!64*. With several key Commodore 64 titles under its belt, it looked to expand to 16-bit machines and the Spectrum in the late 1980s. The liquidation of Newsfield in 1991 and the rising cost of development left Thalamus with low funds and many unreleased titles before it closed in 1993. The name was revived for Thalamus Publishing, which released a book of Oliver Frey's artwork in 2006.

COMPANY PROFILE

THALAMUS

PUBLICITY

The logo was one memorable aspect of Thalamus. Roger says, "I thought Oliver's logo was brilliant, simple but with so much impact. It looked great on T-shirts." Oliver describes it in *The Fantasy Art Of Oliver Frey*: "I wanted something that indicated sensitivity and a determination to win, and an eye gazing into a distant, imagined future or past." The Thalamus Club offered merchandise like watches and free pencils during its short existence. Another collectable is the psychedelic 'Fuzzy' given away with *Creatures*. Former Newsfield writer Richard Eddy joined the company to handle PR.
The box artwork was also used for adverts, with distinctive white borders. The 'Thalamus Star' adverts resembled a tacky tabloid front page, with bizarre headlines ('Aliens stole my brain') and facts about forthcoming releases.
The 'Gold Rush' promotions for *Hawkeye* and *Armalyte* each had special golden cassettes distributed, which could be returned to Thalamus for a prize.



» Displaying its Thalamus Europe logo, the disk box for *Nobby The Aardvark* (C64).



» Nobby sails past the wreck of the Titanic in his one-aardvark submarine (C64).

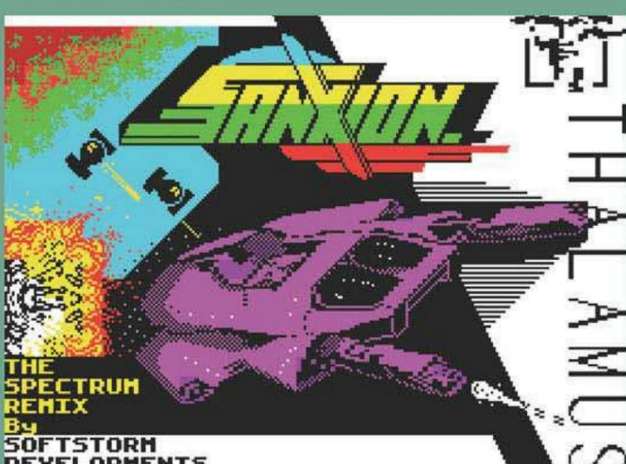
it as his favourite Thalamus game. "I can see it polarises opinion, and can completely understand why some people can't stand it. I really like the music and it hypnotically merged with the gameplay. For me Rob's contribution to that game almost equals Stavros's. We got on really well with Rob and felt he went the extra mile for us. I'd say some of his best work is in the Thalamus games we worked on."

The third game in the Stavros trilogy was *Quedex – The Quest for Ultimate Dexterity*. Each of the ten levels was a maze, requiring different tactics for the shiny metal ball to reach the goal. Stavros had to call a temporary halt to his programming career, returning to Finland for his compulsory national service. After programming the Amiga game *Galactic*, he went on to form Terramarque (that then merged with another Finnish label Bloodhouse to become Housemarque).

> "I CAN SEE IT [DELTA] POLARISES OPINION, AND CAN COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND WHY SOME PEOPLE CAN'T STAND IT." GARY LIDDON

Thalamus was in need of new blood, and newly recruited producer Paul Cooper was on hand to work with potential candidates. Gary Liddon had left to join Electronic Arts, while Andrew Wright had gone back to Activision. Gary states, "The trigger was being refused a profit share or ownership in the company. It just seemed fair that given we were creating a lot of value we should have some stake in it. That was pretty firmly rebuffed." Did Gary have any regrets about leaving? "I think when me and Andy left, the company had a great and very defined image along with a couple of great games that'd done very well. The games were 99 per cent down to Stavros but I think we created a way of presenting them to the public that was distinctive and did them no harm. So I'm pretty proud to have been involved in that and I'd say that firm footing we left the company on seemed to work as a lightning rod for some great up and coming talent in the games industry. I know quite a few of the people who





» *Sanxion* and *Delta* did not get a great reception on the Spectrum.



» Clyde's friend is sliced up by Mr Chainsaw (*Creatures*, C64).



Richard Eddy & Robin Candy (Newsfield employees at the time) model Thalamus T-shirts.



Major Dan Damage's hobbies include origami, skiing and blowing up planets (*Retrograde*, C64).

A DESERVED GOLD MEDAL WENT TO ARMALYTE FROM CYBERDYNE SYSTEMS, A HORIZONTALLY SCROLLING SHOOTER THAT REALLY STRETCHED THE C64. THALAMUS FOUND ITSELF WITH ANOTHER HIT.

made stuff for Thalamus after mine and Andrew's time, and they're really talented people still doing well today."

SECOND WAVE

Martin Walker had previously worked on licensed products including *Back To The Future*, which was completed in rapid time to a strict storyboard. His project for Thalamus was a cross between a puzzle game and a shoot-'em-up – *Hunter's Moon*. Martin contributed music and sound effects to other Thalamus games before creating the superb *Citadel* for Electric Dreams. After a few years concentrating on music, Martin left the industry for good.

The next Thalamus release was *Hawkeye*, a game that divided critics and players. The Boys Without Brains created a good-looking game with parallax scrolling, great music by Jeroen Tel and an amazing animated intro sequence (the face of a Xamoxian telling the story behind the game). Beneath the gloss, however, was a tough, repetitive platform shoot-'em-up. Gordon Houghton came under pressure to give the game a good mark and ultimately it was awarded a Gold Medal. *C&VG* (published by EMAP) gave it a terrible 3 out of 10, while *Commodore User*'s verdict was a more respectable 8. "I think EMAP underrated it and we (more specifically, I) overrated it," admits Gordon. "I was going to give it a Sizzler at the time, but felt pressured by one of the Thalamus people to up the rating. Not bribery – just heavy persuasion, to which I was unfortunately susceptible. It was my first month in the job and I probably wanted to please too many people too much of the time. It's not a mistake I made again, however; it had nothing to do with the Newsfield people, it was all down to me."

Fortunately, a deserved Gold Medal went to *Armalyte* from Cyberdyne Systems, a horizontally scrolling shooter that really stretched the C64. With an eerie soundtrack from Martin Walker and some extremely striking visuals, Thalamus found itself with yet another hit. "*Armalyte* was the best horizontal shooter on the C64, and still one of my favourite shooters today," states Gordon. The team of Dan Phillips, Robin Levy and John Kemp moved to System 3 and the planned sequel was never finished.

PLATFORMS & PITFALLS

Keen to stretch its wings to other formats, Thalamus created *Mind-Roll*, an Amiga and PC conversion of *Quedex*, followed by the Spectrum conversion of *Sanxion*. Another high-scoring debut game was *Retrograde* from Apex Computer Productions – John and Steve Rowlands. Thalamus took a gamble on Apex's short track record in the industry, which paid off. The problem was the speed at which finished games were being released. Several key projects, like *The Search For Sharla*, were proving to be very slow in development – but Thalamus chose not to rush games out of the door.

In 1990, Apex created *Creatures* – or 'Clyde Radcliffe Exterminates All The Unfriendly Repulsive Earth-ridden Slime' to use its full title. The game had a dark sense of humour; between scrolling levels filled with cute enemies, Clyde would have to rescue his fellow Fuzzies from devious 'Acme' torture devices. The sequel had six fiendish devices to stop, with more variety coming from three other sub-games. Helping out was Andy



Cute platformer *Nobby The Aardvark* was released on the C64 but the planned Amiga conversion never saw the light of day.



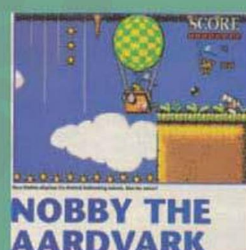
The Amiga version of *Creatures* did not go down well.



Platform shoot-'em-up *Hawkeye* received very mixed reviews.

UNRELEASED GAMES

Thalamus closed its doors with several titles left incomplete. Among the most eagerly anticipated was *The Search For Sharla*, a 3D strategy game in the style of *Lords Of Midnight*. All that survives are screenshots and the novella. The licensed games *Q8 Team Ford Rally Simulation* and *Arsenal FC* also failed to reach the shelves, despite lots of publicity. Conversions figure highly on the AWOL list. The Spectrum versions of *Creatures*, *Armalyte* and *Bombuzal* (under licence from Image Works, the Mirrorsoft label) did not get finished, but a demo of *Armalyte* appeared on a Your Sinclair covertape. *Armalyte 2* for the C64 got as far as demo form, with a weapon shop and reused graphics. Amiga users missed out on *Beastmaster* (inspired by *Shadow Of The Beast*), *Nobby The Aardvark* and *Restrictor* (described by programmer Richard Underhill as "a cross between *Galaxy Force* and *OutRun*/*Afterburner*").



FINEST HOUR

ARMALYTE (C64, 1988)

Regularly topping polls for the best shoot-'em-up on the Commodore 64, there can only be one winner here. Everything works so well, from the extra weapons to the soundtrack. Cyberdyne Systems may have been unhappy with the marketing ploy of labelling it '*Delta 2*' but it surpasses the gameplay of the earlier Stavros Fasoulas title. Play it on the original machine though: the Amiga and ST conversion (*Armalyte: The Final Run*) is a pale imitation.



THALAMUS



» Maximus collected Acme crates to assemble a vehicle, enabling him to get to the next level (*Summer Camp*, C64).

Roberts, *Commodore Format*'s tips expert. After writing a letter full of suggestions to the Rowlands, Andy ended up heavily involved in both games – from writing the manuals to designing graphics.

John Ferrari took up programming to fill the winter months when he wasn't working as a builder. After producing budget titles for Codemasters, John came up with *Summer Camp*. Maximus Mouse had to get to the Moon via a series of single-screen sections to find an American flag for the opening of Camp Wotadump. John also worked on the *Arsenal FC* football game, viewed from the side when other games had adopted the overhead *Kick Off*-style view. Sadly, John died in 1996.

Thalamus published more titles for the Amiga and ST, but they were less well received. The 16-bit conversion of *Creatures* failed to make much impact, and Pieter Opdam's *Venom Wing* and *Borobodur* both had great graphics but difficult gameplay. Graphic artist Metin Seven worked alongside Pieter. Metin recalls, "It was like a dream signing a contract with Thalamus. They had become a respected name in the games business. I'll never forget when Paul



» *Venom Wing* was called 'Hawkwind' during development.

Cooper came over to the Netherlands for a few days, and during that weekend we signed the contract. When the game was released it received reviews ranging from bad to satisfactory, and the satisfactory ones were published in *Zzap!64* and *The Games Machine*, both magazines from the Newsfield publishing company, who were also the owner of Thalamus." A dispute between Pieter, Metin and musician Ramon Braumuller over the high difficulty level led to the team splitting up. "Thalamus did pay a sum of money that corresponded to the proceeds they had estimated, but we have never checked what the actual proceeds from all *Venom Wing* sales were. Ramon and I used our share of the proceeds to travel to Britain and attend the Personal Computer World show together with Pieter, to meet the people of Thalamus there." Pieter would go on to work at Team 17 on projects including *Worms*, while Metin and Ramon joined forces with programmer Reinier van Vliet to write games including *Hoi* and *Clockwiser*.

THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

A big shock occurred when Newsfield went into liquidation. Thalamus had to go out on its own, trading as Thalamus Europe. Roger reveals, "My recollection is a bit hazy, but we let the



» *Delta*'s innovative Mix-e-load system (C64).

GAMES REVIEWS



HEATSEEKER

C64, 1990

» Programmer Paul O' Malley's sequel to his earlier game *Arac* has an environmental theme and an unusual style. The player controlls a Leg as it hops around the rainforest. On top is the Ball, which can be thrown out to kill enemies and, more importantly, absorb heat from fires. This heat can then be passed on to giant Plants, which open their leaves to protect the forest against acid rain.

81%



SNARE

C64, 1989

» A temporal portal hides a maze with the promise of a rich reward at the end of it. Programmer Rob Stevens took elements of *Tron*'s light-cycle game and created some fiendish puzzles. Jumping, shooting aliens and hitting switches are made more difficult by the snap 90° turns of the screen as you move. Shiny graphics and great music from Martin Walker round out the experience, underrated at the time.

90%

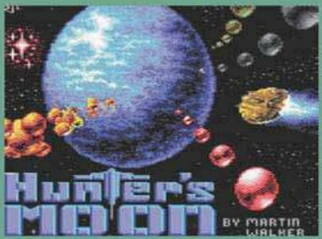


RETROGRADE

C64, 1989

» John and Steve Rowlands' rock-hard blaster has a very clever weapons upgrade system. The first step is collecting cash and the 'planet busters' from the surface. Then it's vertically scrolling platforms as you head down the ducts into the core. With the planet in ruins, the hero flies off to confront a huge mothership that is destroyed by shooting it to bits. A challenging game that is brilliantly presented.

95%



HUNTER'S MOON

C64, 1987

» Martin Walker's polished shoot-'em-up is worth revisiting. The enemy workers 'draw' the walls of the level as the player's Hunter spacecraft searches for starcells that show the way home. The puzzle elements become more devious later on, and the off-duty 'loop trainer' mode recalls Jeff Minter's work. An end sequence by Robin Levy and Cyberdyne Systems and some unusual sound FX make it memorable.

93%



WINTER CAMP

C64 & AMIGA, 1992

» What made this special were the cartoon graphics and varied styles of play. Maximus Mouse has to learn to ice skate, canoes down a river, throws snowballs in an *Operation Wolf* style level, follows a tune played on icicles and rolls down the mountain side in a giant snowball. All this to stop an eagle causing an avalanche! Elements of the game were inspired by a reader competition in *Zzap!64*.

86%



BOROBODUR

AMIGA, 1992

» *Venom Wing* was very tough, and Pieter Opdam's next game was just as difficult. Subtitled 'The Planet of Doom', *Borobodur* starts out as a platform game with some very polished graphics. After fighting your way through the jungle, it then switches to a 3D hoverbike racing game. The two styles alternate until you reach the final bad guy in his huge robot suit. Very tough, but it looked great.

79%

then-management of Thalamus (which included David Birch) do a management buy-out on some kind of sliding payment deal over time; this was a short while before Newsfield's September 1991 demise. Thalamus carried on for about a further two years, but in the end it was caught out in the squeeze of underfunding and the increased costs of developing for the new console devices. Certainly, before Newsfield let go of control, the drain on central funds due to the rapidly increasing development times was having a detrimental effect – if not on final profits, certainly on cash flow. I would never go so far as to say that Thalamus Games brought Newsfield down, but it definitely contributed."

"The big problem was Newsfield Publications going bankrupt," admits musician Ashley Hogg. "That was a short way into *Nobby The Aardvark* if I recall. For the most part, we were left to our own devices but, as usually happens, the project took longer than we were hoping. The up-front advance was pretty low, offset by a higher royalty rate, but cash was tight – always a problem for small developers anyway. Thalamus got bought out and Codemasters asked me to move to their locale and help out with a project. Dave Clarke and Jon Smyth finished up the C64 version over the following few months and eventually it got a release. The Amiga version died right there. But I was pleased that I managed to cram so much music into the C64 version." As for his memories of Thalamus Europe, at that time, "Thalamus was a really small outfit basically run by one guy out of a small office. Even handling production of one game, that was pretty tight back then. I also seem to remember the liquidators' reports making interesting reading…"

> "AFTER SPENDING WHAT SEEMED LIKE DAYS ON THE PHONE WITH LAWYERS AND LIQUIDATORS, ALL OF THE THALAMUS TITLES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF STAVROS'S GAMES, WERE LINED UP FOR A PHOENIX-LIKE REBIRTH." ANDY ROBERTS

Thalamus struck a deal with budget label Kixx to republish many of the older titles and provide much-needed cash. The last game to be released was *S.U.B.* (Strategic Underwater Battles), an Amiga strategy title imported and translated by Thalamus. The 62% score from *Amiga Power* was a sad end. Left in limbo were several titles (see Unreleased Games) including the potentially lucrative *Arsenal FC*. Gary Liddon says, "Best memory? Well, it's just one big best memory. As for the worst? It was sad to see it decline over the years, then going bust."

GAME OVER?

There was life after death (of a sort) for Thalamus. Andy Roberts started a new label called Thalamus Interactive. With Steve and John Rowlands on board, as well as C64 coder Jon Wells, the company was responsible for *Zidane Generation Football* and *International Karate Advance* on Game Boy formats. Andy says, "The initial premise was to bring the back catalogue to modern-day formats such as the Game Boy Color (which was just entering the peak of its life-cycle). After spending what seemed like days on the phone with lawyers and liquidators, all of the Thalamus titles, with the exception of Stavros's games, were lined up for a phoenix-like rebirth. The furthest we got was a GBA demo; getting original product on to the Game Boy was exceedingly difficult, most publishers preferring the security of a big-name licence. And thus we switched to developing original ideas and IPs, but with the emphasis firmly on quality (I'd always liked the way that the gloss and polish of Thalamus titles was of an exceptionally high standard – you were always guaranteed a top-notch product)." According to Andy, "The Thalamus back catalogue remains locked in a fireproof safe, just waiting for the right moment to make a comeback."

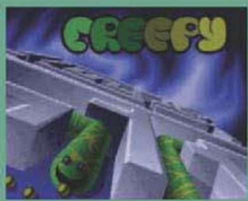
Roger Kean and Oliver Frey formed a new company called Thalamus Publishing. The book most games fans were interested in appeared in April 2006 – *The Fantasy Art Of Oliver Frey*, including several examples of Oli's artwork for Thalamus. Roger says, "There has been a decade-long discussion about a History of Video Gaming but it always looked like no-one would be that interested. Up until 1996 we were still heavily involved in creating hint and tip books on games for various book publishers like Virgin, Carlton and Prima in the United States. *The Fantasy Art Of Oliver Frey* by no means featured all the material that still remains in Oli's possession, so there will probably be a second volume for everyone to enjoy in another year."



On the Planet of Doom, our hero narrowly avoids running into a Ferrari, a Lamborghini and a Batmobile… (*Borobodur*, Amiga).



More frosty shenanigans with the aptly named *Winter Camp*.



CREEPY (Amiga, 1990)
Not the finest moment in Thalamus's history, *Creepy* is an uninspired clone of *Snake* produced by a French team. The worm slithers around a maze, eating pellets and trying to avoid crashing into its own tail as it grows. It really did not stretch the Amiga or gamers and soon proved frustrating.

THE DELTA CONTROVERSY

Delta on the Commodore 64 had great graphics, an amazing in-game tune from Rob Hubbard (part Pink Floyd, part Philip Glass as suggested by Gary Liddon), and the unforgettable Mix-e-load: with a joystick, C64 users could remix the Rob Hubbard loading music. It also had the power-ups its predecessor *Sanxion* lacked. But *Delta* only got a 74% rating from *Zzap!* (and a bad review from Gary Penn in particular), due to the need to learn patterns and the tricky credits system for earning extra weapons (trying to pick up something you don't have enough credits for kills you, and you need to keep topping up the extras). *Delta* did earn a Screen Star from EMAP's *Commodore User*, but *Your Sinclair* voted the Spectrum version (*Delta Charge*) 'worst game of the year' in 1990. Many put this down to the rivalry between YS and Crash.



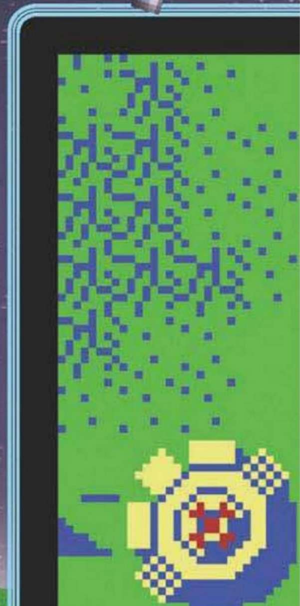
THE DEFINITIVE XEVIOUS

STUART CAMPBELL LOVES WRITING DEFINITIVE GUIDES, AND HE LOVES XEVIOUS. AN OBVIOUS COURSE OF ACTION SEEMED TO PRESENT ITSELF.

Xevious (pronounced "ZEE-vee-uss" to rhyme with "devious", not "ex-EE-vee-uss") is one of Namco's Golden Generation of games. Along with *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian*, *Mappy*, *Rally-X*, *Dig Dug* and (inexplicably) *Tower Of Druaga*, its evocative iconography pops up again and again in the company's titles, throughout the 25 years from the original arcade release of Masanobu Endoh's classic vertical-scrolling shoot-'em-up to the present day. Not just the iconography, either – the entire game shows up as a bonus unlockable in titles as recent as *Ridge Racer 7* on the PS3 and *Starfox Assault* on the GameCube. It broke all kinds of new ground in both graphics and gameplay when it debuted in 1982, becoming a highly-successful and widely-ported coin-op, and provided foundations that are still in use in modern shmups like the *Raiden* series (see RG26). But most of all, *Xevious* is notable because it was and remains a brilliant and challenging game, loaded with atmosphere and a distinctive visual style that still looks good a quarter of a century on.

Yet compared to most of the games listed above, the mention of *Xevious* to the average gamer under the age of 30 will be met with a blank look, and even those who remember it will be hard-pushed to identify the existence of any other titles in the line (especially if they're not from Japan, where *Xevious* is celebrated as a true classic). But the game actually has a rich family history – full of sequels and updates and remakes and spin-offs – that's well worth and long overdue an investigation, and as it happens we've got our investigating hat on today. Investigate go!





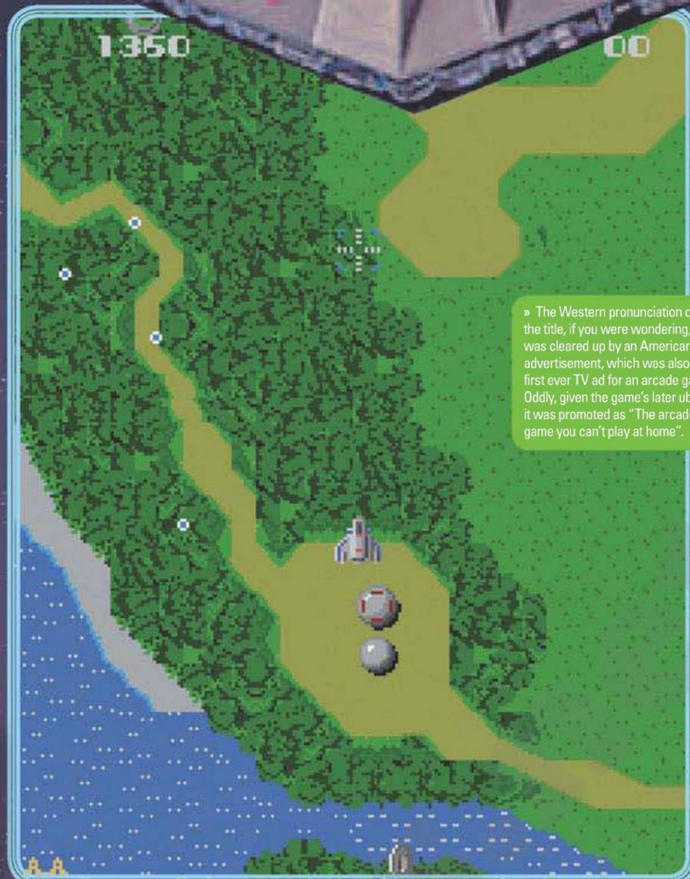
1982
XEVIOUS (ARCADE)

Not many people know the plot of *Xevious*, or indeed that it even has one. Set in 2012 (Yikes! Not long now!) around the famous real-life "Nazca lines" of Southern Peru, the convoluted tale depicts the fight against an ancient race of humans long departed from Earth, but now returning to claim their ancestral home under the control of a huge supercomputer called GAMP (General Artificial Matrix Producer). The storyline is explored very little in any of the games, but was actually the subject of both a novel (by Endoh himself) and a full-length animated movie in Japan, which was released on VHS videotape. Do drop RG a line if you ever stumble across a copy.

One of the game's most pioneering innovations was the behaviour of your enemies – where most scrolling shooters, both before and up to the present day, attack the player with incredibly dumb fixed formations which will happily follow each other straight into the line of your fire, the *Xevious* forces are intelligent individual craft, reluctant to get in front of your guns and prepared to retreat, veer off to the side or even sneak past you then attack from behind. This makes *Xevious* far more challenging than most shmups, without ever needing to fill the screen with hundreds of enemies and bullets – it gets extremely tough at about the 200,000 mark, and almost impossibly savage around 400,000, though eventually it simply loops back to the beginning. So little did Namco expect people to achieve such feats that if you keep looping and exceed the display limit of 9,999,990 points, the game crashes.

PLAY IT NOW ON: There were countless contemporary homeports of *Xevious* (the Sharp X68000 actually got two separate, slightly different ones), many of them barely recognisable as the same game (particularly the atrocious Speccy, C64 and Amstrad versions). But you can easily play the arcade-perfect version today on *Namco Museum 50th Anniversary* (PS2, Xbox, Gamecube, PC) or *Namco Museum Battle Collection* (PSP). There's even a surprisingly good mobile-phone port, which gets round the awkward-control issues by optionally automating both bombing and shooting. For no good reason the US NES version was retitled *Xevious: The Avenger*.





» The Western pronunciation of the title, if you were wondering, was cleared up by an American TV advertisement, which was also the first ever TV ad for an arcade game. Oddly, given the game's later ubiquity, it was promoted as "The arcade game you can't play at home".



» The PC-6001 version had guest appearances from both Pac-Man and red ghost Shadow.

1983
TINY XEVIOUS (PC-6001, MZ-700)

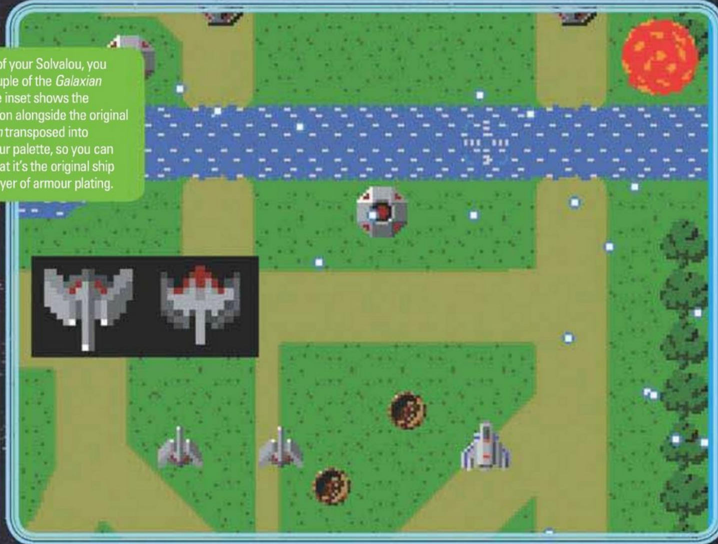
It doesn't take long, when examining the *Xevious* family tree, to fall out of the branches and into a world of hurt. *Xevious* was particularly popular in Japan, and any halfway-dedicated retro gamer knows that the home computer scene in Japan in the early Eighties is a baffling and daunting labyrinth of weird and often extremely primitive micros with names full of Zs and Xs. Nothing even approaching an authentic port of the coin-op was possible on these limited, blocky machines, so Namco (in association with a company called Dempa) came up with an entirely new game that the hardware could cope with. It's sort of like a remix of the original, with random combinations of enemies and ground targets thrown in (to the point where even the Andor Genesis mothership is sometimes accompanied by attacking ground bases, which never happens in the coin-op), but it captures the essential *Xevious* atmosphere pretty well. There was also a second incarnation, *Tiny Xevious Mk.II*, for the upgraded version of the PC-6001, which had superior graphics and stuck more closely to arcade *Xevious*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The emulator Virtual NEC Trek does a decent job of running *Tiny Xevious*. You'll need to set the memory to 16K and enter 2 when the boot screen asks you for the number of "pages"

1984
SUPER XEVIOUS (ARCADE)

Astounded that people were managing to break the original game, Namco brought out an update in early 1984. Basically just a tweaked version with the difficulty bumped up, *Super* did introduce a few quirky little tricks, most notably in the various single craft – a tank, a jet fighter and a helicopter – which popped up at set points in the game and, if destroyed, rather evilly reset your score to zero. There's also a special cameo to watch out for from a few squadrons of *Galaxian* flagships, stylishly retooled in the game's silver-grey livery.

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME, or in *Xevious 3D/G+* for the PSone.



» To the left of your Solvalou, you can see a couple of the *Galaxian* flagships. The inset shows the *Xevious* version alongside the original from *Galaxian* transposed into *Xevious*' colour palette, so you can clearly see that it's the original ship with a new layer of armour plating.



» Inside the mothership there's surprisingly no boss, just lots of ground emplacements to bomb before you fly out again.

1985
SUPER XEVIOUS GAMP NO NAZO (NES)

Translating as 'The Riddle Of GAMP', this Japan-only NES game was the first true *Xevious* sequel (despite the name, it's not related to coin-op *Super Xevious*), and it expands the premise of the original considerably. The scenery is much more varied, comprised of small sections you keep looping round until you've performed the unspecified task required (the 'riddles' of the title), such as bombing every enemy, and there are power-ups like giant bombsights to collect (by shooting down captured ships in a kind of *Galaga* style, then carrying them around for a bit, then waiting for them to fly off and return to drop the power-ups for some reason). You can jump around the game world via warps, there are low-level strafing runs with no bombing, cave sections where you explode on entry, and you even get to attack the interior of the Andor Genesis (which, TARDIS-style, is much bigger on the inside). It's a bizarre game, complicated and confusing and mercilessly hard even before it starts pulling mean tricks like hiding enemy fighters underneath clouds. With no continues you'll need an awful lot of persistence if you're ever going to solve the riddle of what the heck's going on in *GAMP No Nazo*.

PLAY IT NOW ON: VirtuaNES.

1988
XEVIOUS FARDRAUT SAGA (MSX2)

Despite being heavily marketed, *GAMP No Nazo* wasn't a big hit, so for the next *Xevious* game Namco went right back to basics. *Fardraut Saga*, while loaded with power-ups and new enemies and innovations, is basically classic *Xevious*, even taking place over much of the same terrain. (To give you a sneak preview, the original coin-op is included in the guise of "Recon" mode, as opposed to the main "Scramble" game.)

The most significant change is the provision of four different ships instead of just your standard Solvalou, which you can mix and match across your lives before the game starts, if for example you want to tackle early levels with the weaker fighters but give yourself more powerful craft later on. The trade-off is that while the new ships have more firepower, they increase the number of points required to gain an extra life, from the Solvalou's 50,000 up to a whopping 300,000 for the multi-firing, big-bombed Gampmission. You'll want all the offensive capabilities you can get your hands on at first, because this is a punishing and unforgiving game, but you'll inch a little further with every play and there's always something new to see.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The excellent BlueMSX emulator.



» Just before you encounter the new beefed-up Andor Genesis, you fly over a whole airstrip full of the old models upgraded.





» *Xevious* actually has its own alphabet and language, made up of angular characters and most extensively displayed in the *Fardraut* games. "Solvalou" translates roughly as "sun bird".

1990
XEVIOUS FARDRAUT DENSETSU (PC ENGINE)

Although as far as this reporter knows, "Densetsu" translates as "Saga", this isn't the same game as the MSX2 title. (The MSX game ends with the message "See you again next game – Episode 2 Final Weapon", so while it's not explicitly called such a thing it seems likely that the PCE game is actually that.)

If Saga is Xevious on steroids (pumped-up and much-augmented, but lumbering and sluggish), then Densetsu is Xevious after a serious amphetamine injection. Split into distinct levels with ever-larger static bases at the end of each one, Densetsu whips along at a much nippier pace, stripped of all extraneous fripperies. (Don't you just hate extraneous fripperies?) You get a different ship for each stage (you don't see the Solvalou until Level 3, which is lifted directly from a long section of the first Xevious), but there are no obvious differences between any of them, and power-ups are reduced to gradually incrementing the rate and width of your cannon fire.

It's an exhausting, exciting game made rather more welcoming by being able to restart from the beginning of any level you've reached, but still presents a daunting challenge.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The peerless PCE emu Magic Engine.

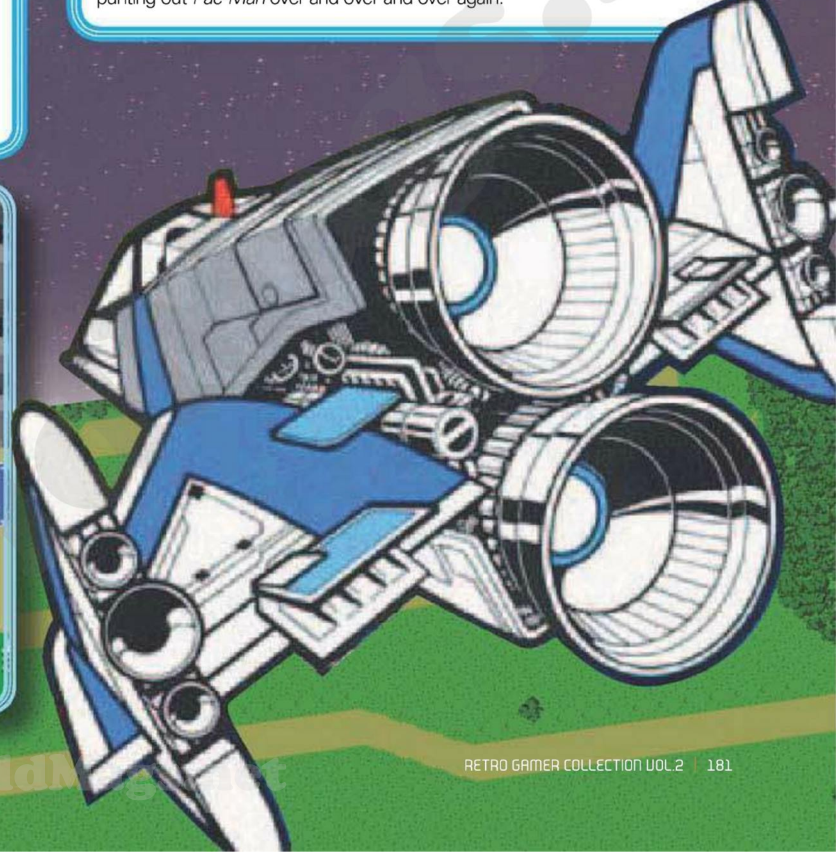
1991
SOLVALOU (ARCADE)

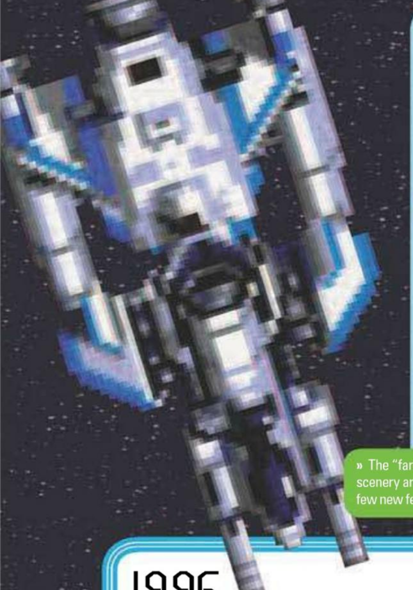
Having crudely tacked a 3D on-rails polygon shooter onto the *Galaxian* line the previous year (see RG 32), Namco extended the policy to *Xevious* in 1991. This time at least the result was reasonably faithful to the series (trivia fact: the cabinet actually bears the word "Fardraut", though it isn't mentioned anywhere else), and played substantially like a first-person version of "proper" *Xevious*, but curiously (given the success of the very similar, but inferior, *Galaxian3* and *Star Blade*) it wasn't at all popular and very few machines ever made it into arcades. You'll be extremely lucky to see one in the wild nowadays, so get some coins into it pronto if you do. It'll probably be your only chance.

PLAY IT NOW ON: You can't, pretty much. One of the great "lost" coin-ops, *Solvalou* has never been ported to a home format, and runs very poorly and buggily in MAME, so if you missed it the first time you'll have to badger Namco to make some proper new retro release packages instead of just punting out *Pac-Man* over and over and over again.



» *This is the first-stage base, which can be easily despatched with a couple of bombs to the pulsing centre. Later ones are a lot more staunchly fortified.*







» The "farmland" sections of scenery are one of *Arrangement*'s few new features.

1995
XEVIOUS ARRANGEMENT (ARCADE)

As it did after *GAMP No Nazo*, Namco followed up a *Xevious* flop by reverting to the tried-and-tested formula, and in 1995 released the first "real" arcade sequel in the series. Part of a compilation called *Namco Classics Collection Vol.1* (which also featured *Galaga* and *Mappy*), *Arrangement* appeared alongside the original and "*Super*" versions of *Xevious*. (Slightly interestingly, the version of the 1982 *Xevious* found in this coin-op has been modified so that it can be completed instead of just looping until it crashes, but the latter sections are as savage as ever, so for most players it's a moot point.)

Deviating very little from the original blueprint (mildly enhanced graphics, almost no power-ups, a small handful of new enemies), *Arrangement* isn't very interesting or entertaining, save perhaps for the three insanely difficult Extra Areas which can be unlocked by performing tasks such as finishing the game without continues. It's particularly weak musically, lacking the famous hypnotic eight-note trance loop of its grandparent or any of the inventive variations of it found in the MSX and PC Engine games.

PLAY IT NOW ON: *Namco Classics Collection Vol.1* works well in MAME. *Arrangement* can also be found on *Xevious 3D/G* for the PlayStation (see next entry).

1996
XEVIOUS 3D/G (ARCADE, PSONE)

Perhaps in slight embarrassment, Namco only waited a year before rushing out another *Xevious* follow-up, and this time it made a much better job of it. Returning to 3D, but this time in the more traditional overhead view, *3D/G* is a rather lovely remake, fast and pretty and smooth and fresh, without ever straying too far from the classic formula. The main novelty is the choice of three weapon systems, changed or powered-up with crystals released by bombing ground targets, although they make little difference to strategy. With infinite continues on offer, lazy cheats can clear the seven rather short but varied levels in under half-an-hour (and view an end sequence which finally explains the significance of the Nazca lines), but the true challenge is of course to beat the game in a single credit, and that's a much more demanding discipline. (It's a shame nobody had yet thought of the incrementing-credits system used to such compelling effect in modern-day shmups like *Gradius V* and *Raiden 3*.)

With *Xevious*, *Super Xevious* and *Xevious Arrangement* all included in the PSone release (retitled *Xevious 3D/G+*), and some cute secret unlockables like the ability to turn your Solvalou into Paul or Heihachi from *Tekken* (which also has an effect on the end movie), *3D/G* is a very likeable little game, reminiscent in feel of the Mega CD's splendid *Silpheed*. The PSone played host to the heyday of the classic-remaker's art (Hasbro's update of *Pong*, for example, is one of the greatest games of the 32-bit era), and this is a fine example of the form.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your PSone/PS2, or the PlayStation emu ePSXe.



» Even a laser as powerful as this can't take out those implacable flat Bacura shields.





» The screen you'll see most often in Scramble Mission.

2006
XEVIOUS SCRAMBLE MISSION (TV GAME)

After such a flurry of activity in the early 1990s, *Xevious* sadly failed to make an appearance in gaming's subsequent generation, save for the usual Namco cameos, most notably in *Starfox Assault*. The first new *Xevious* game in a decade appeared neither in arcades nor on console but – as with *Gaplus Phalanx* from Issue 32's *Galaxian* feature – on a Japanese plug-in TV game. The matchbox-sized unit features (along with two *Mappy* games) the original *Xevious* and *Scramble Mission*: a time-attack game where your Solvalou speeds through little tunnel levels a bit like the inside-the-mothership ones in *GAMP No Nazo*, collecting "S" flags and avoiding ground and air attacks until you reach each level's mothership.

You start with 90 seconds on the clock, and lose just three seconds every time you get shot, but you'll need every spare moment you can get if you're going to blow up all the weak points on each increasingly-evasive mothership before the timer runs out. The tunnels get twistier and tougher as you move through the six levels, with moving barriers to negotiate and doors that have to be shot open with your Zapper. With the sort of care and attention that so often shames penny-pinching Western publishers, the unit saves scores and progress to its own memory, and with the six levels making for an addictive maximum game length of nine minutes (less than seven if you're good), there's always time for a quick shot at your high score.

PLAY IT NOW ON: You'll need a man in Japan if you want to try your hand at *Scramble Mission*. The units work fine on British TVs, but I don't know of anyone importing them commercially as yet – www.ncsx.com used to have them in its catalogue for $39, but don't seem to any more.

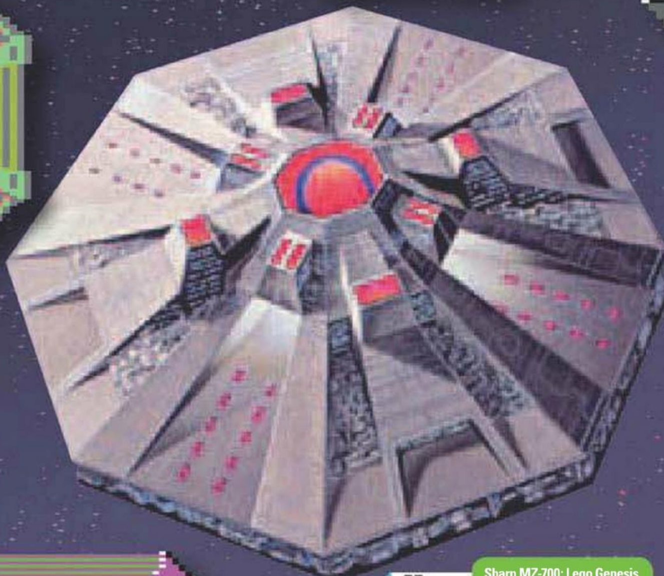
ANNWIDDECOMBE GENESIS, MORE LIKE

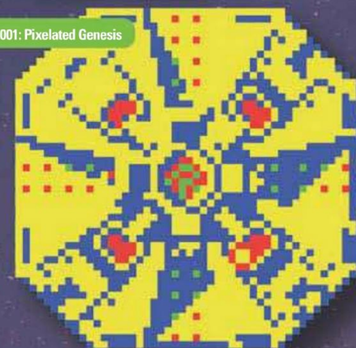
The Andor Genesis mothership was one of the first bosses in videogaming – certainly the first in a scrolling shmup – and occupies an honoured place in the hall of videogaming icons. Unfortunately, it's also had to suffer some tremendous indignities in the care of cack-handed conversion coders.


The original in all her fiery glory

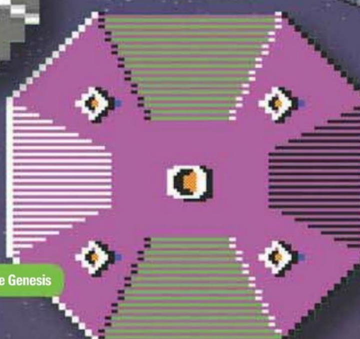

Amstrad CPC: Clash Genesis


Atari 5200: Pavement Pizza Genesis

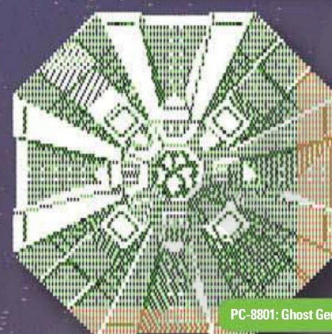



PC-6001: Pixelated Genesis


Commodore 64: Not Even Trying Genesis


Apple 2: Purple Genesis


Sharp MZ-700: Lego Genesis


PC-8801: Ghost Genesis

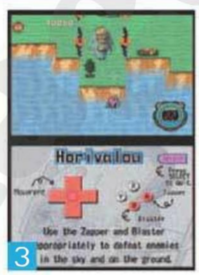
HERE, THERE, ANYWHERE


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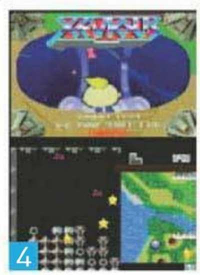

2

Attentive viewers will already know how Namco loves to slip the characters and icons from its "Golden Generation" games into other titles – *Xevious* itself has hosted guest appearances from *Rally-X* (the secret "S" flags that signify extra lives or points bonuses if you can find them), *Galaxian* (chromed-up flagships showing up in *Super Xevious*), *Pac-Man* (in *Tiny Xevious*) and *Dig Dug* (you can encounter a giant Pooka boss in *3D/G*). *Xevious* pops up in the unlikeliest of places, though. It's not much of a surprise to encounter it in arcade shmup mini-game collection *Tenkomori Shooting* (fig.1), and the *GAMP* baddies showing up in the That's Galactic Dancin' stage of the X68000's *Galaga 88 Arrangement* (fig. 2) isn't much of a leap either, but it's perhaps rather less expected as "Horivalou" in *Dig Dug Digging Strike* on the DS (fig.3). The weirdest, though, has to be the *Xevious* level somehow worked into Japanese DS *Tetris*-ish puzzler *Trion Cube* (fig.4).

It's not just Namco that likes to honour this most venerable of scrolling shooters, though. Back in 1990, legendary Amiga shmup *SWIV* was one of the first games to pinch *Xevious*' idea of having the whole gameworld as a single continuous level, and it recognised the debt with a lovely little tribute section early in the game (fig.5) featuring *Xevious*' distinctive landscape style populated by three of its trademark enemies (the Toroid fighter, Domogram ground tank and the famous Bacura spinning shields). It's a charming acknowledgement, and a lovely surprise the first time you see it. Unless, of course, some idiot's just spoiled it for you in a magazine.



3


4


5

SHINOBI

NO BIRTHDAY PRESENT FOR YOU



- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £50+ PCB BOARD



HISTORY

Spare a thought for poor old *Shinobi* this year. Despite sharing a 21st birthday with brother *After Burner*, parents Sega, have forgotten about its little ninja offspring.

For you see, while the recent release of *After Burner: Black Falcon* proudly updates Suzuki's classic arcade blaster for the PSP, no such release seems promised (PSP or otherwise) for the king of the ninjas.

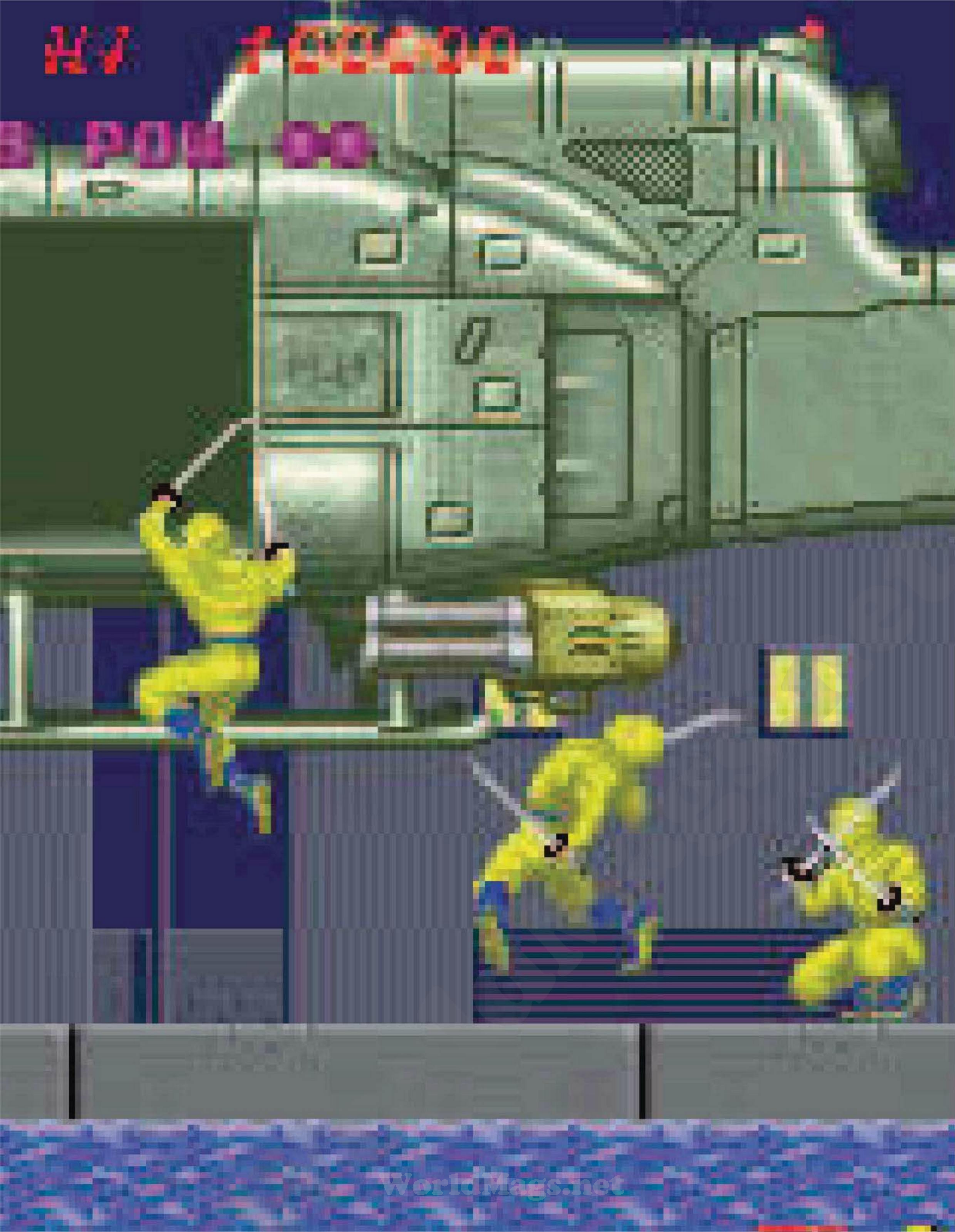
Of course, you can't really blame Sega (both *Shinobi* and sequel *Nightshade* on the PS2 didn't exactly set the sales charts alight) but it seems a bit of a shame that it hasn't tried to capitalise on its venerable franchise reaching its big 2 1.

Therefore let us take a stroll down memory lane and remember what made the game so damned great in the first place. While it wasn't the prettiest game to be found in arcades at the time, *Shinobi* offered plenty of enjoyment for those that decided to chance ten pence on it.

The multi-tiered leaping from level to level was very reminiscent of Namco's *Rolling Thunder*, while the addition of a ninja lead made sure that Sega had the coolness factor well and truly sewn up. Then, of course, there was the fact that you were able to use ninja magic, throw shurikens, and even obtain the odd gun for greatly enhanced firepower. With a finite amount of children to rescue on each stage and some ruthless enemies to tackle, *Shinobi* never let up for a second and required your full concentration if you were to reach the end of each section and face-off against the huge bosses that awaited you. While the likes of Ken-Oh proved fairly easy to vanquish, later foes (including the helicopter shown here) could be a right pig to beat; and wait until you reach the final level…

Still, once you finally beat an end-of-level boss you had the chance to earn a life in one of the greatest mini-games we have ever played. We would have shown it here but that goddamned helicopter is just too cool.





Year released: Japan: June 1983, US: November 1982, UK: May 1983

Original price: Japan: 54800 Yen, US: $199.99, UK: £149.99

Buy it now for: £50-75

Associated magazines: None

Why the Vectrex was great… Vectors have never gone out of fashion. They were cool in the Eighties, and they are still cool today as witnessed by games such as *Geometry Wars*. They have not aged with time like many other graphics, their sharp pinpoint definition and almost hypnotic phosphor glow drawing you closer. The games behind them were pretty good also, with a level of quality today that just keeps going up and up. To not Vectrex is to be incomplete.

VECTREX

UNTIL 1982 ALL HOME SYSTEMS HAD ONE THING IN COMMON: THEY OUTPUTTED A RASTER DISPLAY. THE VECTREX, IN ITS SLEEK BLACK EXTERIOR, WAS ABOUT TO CHANGE ALL THAT. MAT ALLEN TAKES A LOOK AT A CONSOLE THAT HAS ARGUABLY GAINED IN POPULARITY WITH TIME, AND IS NOW CONSIDERED AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ANY GAMING COLLECTION.



The Vectrex is a complete aberration when you look at it in today's gaming environment: different to anything that came before it or has come after it. While there are a few other examples of the display/machine hybrid, it is the only one to stand out in its own right, and the only machine to offer a dedicated vector-based gaming experience. The fact it also had one of the shortest life spans of any machine makes it doubly interesting. If you thought the Dreamcast didn't have that long of a commercial life, then pity the poor Vectrex which was dead within 18 months of its launch. Yet today it has such a cult following, and a homebrew scene second in size to that of the Atari 2600.

The men primarily responsible for creating the Vectrex we love today were Jay Smith and Gerry Karr. Smith had a long and detailed technical background that started while working on the Apollo space program. "I was really a gadget maker, and not too long after that I went to work at Mattel Toys," he states. "We got into making electronic toys, and from electronic toys to videogames, which were just coming onto the scene."

Smith was also head of two companies that are often labelled together as Smith Engineering/Western Technologies, which for the further purposes of this article are abbreviated to SE/WT. The real break for Smith came with the Microvision, which was picked up by Milton Bradley (MB) for distribution in 1979. It was while dealing with MB that Karr met Smith; Karr would later work on the Microvision before being hired for what would become the Vectrex project and be responsible for much of the technical design.

"We really didn't have any idea at the time that this would become a classic. What we were trying to do was push the envelope, move it to the next level, do something unique, make your contribution that way, and provide another outlet," admits Smith. Vector machines such as *Asteroids* and *Tempest* were popular in

Larger Vision

Not only was Jay Smith responsible for designing the first vector home console, he also designed the world's first portable machine, the Microvision. Unlike modern incarnations such as the Game Boy and PSP, the Microvision was just a hollow shell with buttons and an LCD display. The real grunt of each game was present on the changeable cartridges; they didn't just contain the 2k of ROM holding the instructions, but also housed the actual processor.

If you think this sounds like a strange way to do things, then you'd be right. The whole idea of the handheld was way before the technology existed to do it proper justice, especially considering the screen resolution was a mere 16x16 pixels. By the time Milton Bradley canned the project two years later there had been 11 releases in the US and seven in Europe. Today a good condition Microvision is hard to find given it often suffers from the ravages of time.



"THE VECTREX IS A COMPLETE ABERRATION WHEN YOU LOOK AT IT IN TODAY'S GAMING ENVIRONMENT"

REX



VECTREX
MB
VECTREX
CASSETTE
PERCHASE
MB
VECTREX
CASSETTE
FORTRESS OF
NARZOD
NARZOD
VECTREX
1 2 3 4

the arcades and Karr recalls "...part of the initial design specification and push to sell was to produce a device capable of emulating *Asteroids*." Continuing the portable theme, the idea for a handheld device was formed and a prototype was built with a one-inch screen using a supply found by hardware designer John Ross, though in hindsight it was incredibly hard to achieve logistically given the short distances involved with deflecting the dots from the plates inside the CRT.

Towards the end of 1980, so it is told, workers from SE/WT found a supply of five-inch monitors going cheap and it was decided that the new vector project was going to be based upon this display instead. "There were really only two iterations of design. The original concept was for a device called Mini Arcade. It was a five-inch screen, much smaller and less capable. We ended up licensing it to GCE, in a different configuration, but quite similar to what it looks like now. As we were on a short schedule, and we had control over the design, there was constant evolution right up to production. At any one time, it was prototyped what was there, but conceptually it didn't vary a great deal," states Smith. By the end of the year the general design of the machine was almost complete and Smith began to look for potential investors.

"We optioned the product to Kenner, who were the ones to do the *Star Wars* products. Kenner thought about it, and thought, and thought, and this all occurred in the winter of 1980, spring of 1981. Finally in the summer of 1981 they decided no, it would not be popular, would never go. They gave it back to us in around July or August, and we went to a guy called Ed Krakauer, who was the key guy for Intellivision at Mattel and then left to form his own company called GCE, or General Consumer Electronics."

Krakauer saw the potential for the machine immediately. "Ed was really quite a visionary, and he took a look at it and said, 'Great, that's wonderful, if it could have a bigger screen, I'd really be interested.'" Hence in place of the original five-inch screen, the final design encompassed a nine-inch screen instead.

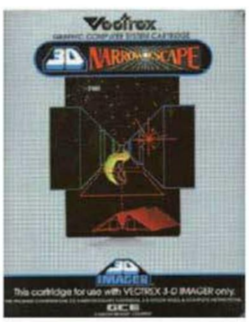
The 'Mini Arcade' name was not exactly catchy in the eyes of the marketing people (and apparently the name of another already existing product), and so a suitable replacement was sought. After a brainstorming session, programmer Tom Sloper came up with the name 'Vector-X', which was eventually contracted to the name we know today.

"And so by September or October we were in fully swing with a plan to do a games system and 12 games, and have them all ready to show by June 1982, which was about nine or ten months away. So in the ensuing ten months we developed the entire games system, the operating system for the game, 12 games that were showable at CES, and that was the birth of Vectrex."

In that time, a number of design points were nailed down, such as the screen orientation, the control system and the overlays. "The Vectrex has a vertically orientated screen instead of horizontal. This was so it didn't look like a TV. By orientating it vertically, it gave it a different look, and it had its own value as a game."

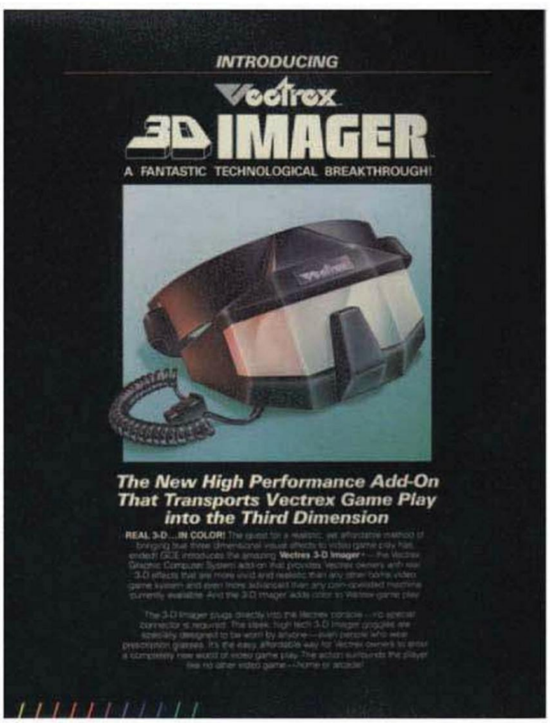
Smith continues to remember the choices made over the joystick. "How did we decide it was an analogue joystick or a digital joystick, and why was it on the left instead of the right? The placement of the joystick wound up being from a discussion if you were flying an F14 or whatever the fighter was at the time, the pilot's hand is on a flight stick in his left, and the throttle in his right. So he does all the flying control with his left hand."

"THE VECTREX HAS A VERTICALLY ORIENTATED SCREEN INSTEAD OF HORIZONTAL. WHY? THE REAL ANSWER WAS SO IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A TV SET" JAY SMITH

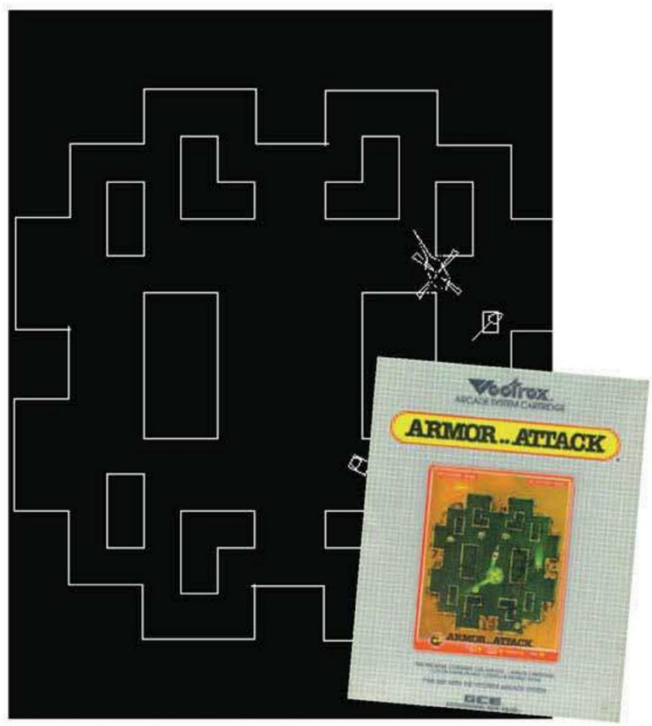


» Probably the best of the three dimensional games, this one showed off the true nature of the headset.


» Gateway to a new dimension of games playing. Or so the company claimed.

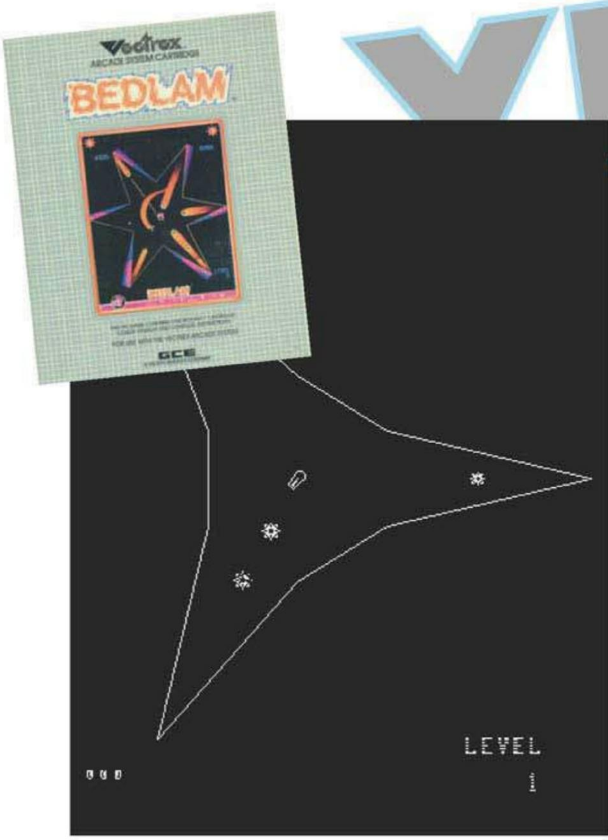


» The *3D Imager*. It promised so much and was never able to deliver on it.



» *Armor Attack*. Like many Vectrex games, this could be played as two-player co-op. Take on the might of tanks and helicopters with just a jeep. Nothing like making it easy.

VECTREX



» *Bedlam*: Easiest way to describe it would a reversed *Tempest* – your ship is in the middle and the enemies attack from the outside.



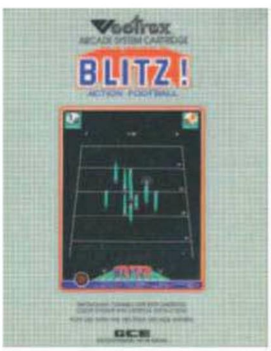
» How are you going to sell the console when it appears the player is more interesting to watch than the game?

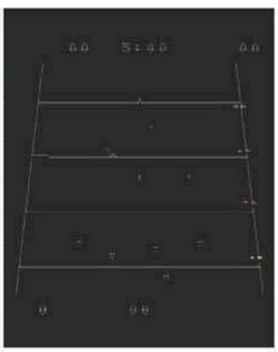
» Using cute manga girls to sell product in Japan is an age-old tradition.





» *Berzerk*: A very competent conversion of the *Stern* arcade apart from slowdown with lots of robots.





» *Blitz*: Go on you Os, you can beat the Xs now!

The size of the joystick unit was based purely on the fact that the unit was as wide as it was, and it needed something that size to fit the slot at the bottom. This is why there were also four buttons to use, and was also the reason why analogue control was present – there was the space and it needed to be filled. Almost all consoles since the Vectrex have had the pad/stick on the left, and in further terms of pioneering, the Vectrex was also the first console to have a dedicated analogue control as standard.

It wasn't all easy going. Smith recalls, "Another big problem along the way was that it was a TV set, and had a lot of digital circuitry in it. The screen with all these electrons running around didn't go well with the digital circuitry at all, there was a lot of moving around, shielding, but we got through it."

In the midst of the hardware finalisation, there needed to be some games to play on it. Paul Alan Newell, Mark Indictor and John Hall were pulled off an Atari 2600 reverse engineer project and assigned to writing games or develop the internals for the launch of the Vectrex instead. Joining them were placement appointees Bill Hawkins and Chris King, who were students at Georgia Tech, and Duncan Muirhead who had just dropped out of a course at UCLA. All six were assigned to write the first batch of games pencilled in (*Minestorm*, *Scramble*, *Armor Attack*, *Star Trek*, *Berzerk* and *Rip Off*) that was later expanded to 12 by the time the console was to be shown at the Chicago CES in June 1982.

Many of the early titles came from Cinematronics, with WT/SE striking a licensing agreement that allowed full access to each other's games. The source code of many of the arcade machines was fully available to the Vectrex programmers, and Cinematronics had the option to release any of the original Vectrex games it liked as full arcade versions (which it eventually did with *Cosmic Chasm*).

Included with each game was the final component, a hard plastic overlay to attach to the front of the unit. The marketing department decided that the black and white display would not be as appealing to the general consumer and it needed an injection of colour. Newell especially was never happy about them, and there was always a rift between some of the programmers and those advertising the machine regarding the policy. Hawkins once joked that they had thought about coding messages into each game stating, "For improved gameplay, remove the overlays!"

Smith comments about having a game included with the console, "At that time most Atari cartridges were done in 4k, with some adventurous cartridges getting up to 8k. The system ROM that ran the machine was put in 4k and the original game that was included with the unit was put in the other half of an 8k ROM. So the included game required no cartridge. Everything was in one ROM within the unit." However, while Hall and Karr had worked together on the system ROM (called the Executor), when Hall was assigned to write *Minestorm*, the eponymous *Asteroids* clone, Karr felt that the module needed rewriting from scratch.

After a successful showing in Chicago, the Vectrex was eventually released in November 1982 in the US for the reasonable price of $199. Following good reviews and press, it sold modestly well and looked to become another success for Smith. It was also around this time that another player was becoming interested in entering

Boston out

A special version of *Clean Sweep* that was co-produced with the Mr. Boston Liquor Company. *Clean Sweep* itself was a *Pac-Man* variant where you controlled a vacuum cleaner sucking up all the money in the maze while pursued by the threatening pincers of doom. However, the vacuum only had a certain capacity, so it had to be emptied every so often.

The new version replaced the vacuum cleaner with the company's symbol, a top hat, and the title screen featured an advert for Mr Boston Liquor products. It was almost certainly never commercially available but was handed out as a promotional item. One copy known to exist is complete with the box and overlay, so the company went the whole hog in producing the full set of pieces. It is, however, the hardest produced cartridge to find as only two others have been found, making this a prime candidate for some high bidding should another one turn up on eBay.



"WHEN DID THEY STEP INTO THE FRAY? JUST ABOUT WHEN THE WHOLE BUSINESS TANKED!" MIKE CARTABIANO



» The delicious *Protector* and cunning *YASI* games from Alex Herbert.



» A variety of other homebrew titles available for the Vectrex.



» A proof of concept program written by Paul Alan Newell and duplicated for sale at CGE 2003.



» *Hyper Chase*: A game very much in the ilk of *Turbo* and other such racers.

the console market properly as Smith comments, "In late '82, GCE began negotiations with Milton Bradley, who bought the whole product line, put it out in force for 1983. They did TV advertising, they actually went up directly against Atari and Intellivision, when in retrospect they should have gone for a niche game or a speciality game, something that a kid could take to his bedroom."

Now Mike Cartabiano comes into the picture, who would work on much of the product development and promotion for the console at Milton Bradley. He had met Smith during the Microvision period as he had just started at MB as a design manager. His thoughts about that time are quite dry humoured and blunt, "Coleco were right down the road from Milton Bradley, so they had to step right into the fray. When did they step into the fray? Just about when the whole business tanked! They had cash but not much brains."

But they had bought the Vectrex and the games, the packaging, and they also decided that this would be a great product for Europe, because at the time Atari, the Intellivision and Colecovision had made a big impact in Europe. MB had a large operation over there, with factories in Ireland and Germany. They shipped a load of Vectrexes over to Frankfurt I think, did some testing and got a great reception over there. People went wild over it in Germany."

MB had the means to distribute and advertise the Vectrex properly worldwide, something up until that point GCE would never have been able to contemplate. Whatever can be said about MB's handling of the console in general, in hindsight without that company this wonderful little machine would probably have been stuck in the US and not be as popular as it is today.

Cartabiano, naturally, has his own scathing critique on the internal promotion of the Vectrex, "So they said now we're going to play with the big boys, but instead of doing it the right way, like get people who knew what the game business was about, who knew how to play games and how to sell games, they gave it to their toy salesmen, who had no interest in pushing this product. So they found themselves facing some sale challenges, meanwhile the business in general was getting very competitive, there was a glut of product."

While the Vectrex was being rolled out in Europe, MB sold the rights to distribute the console in Japan to Bandai, who would label it as the Kousokusen over there. Although the 11 available games were sold at a reasonable price of 4,800 Yen each (around £25 today) the machine never took off, which was an indicator back then of how Japanese attitudes to Western technology has not changed when viewing the similar performance of Microsoft's consoles today.



» The inner workings of the only colour version of the Vectrex.

During 1983 a number of new products were developed, most that never made it to market and two that did. A colour Vectrex was designed, the process of which Smith recalls vividly, "It was a serious proposal to put it in a regular Vectrex case, and the TV tube had two layers of phosphor. The obvious thing to do is make it into a colour TV, but it was three times as expensive because instead of one gun providing a point you had to have three guns for RGB. You had the mask on the tube, the tube was more expensive, the electronics were more expensive; it was out of the question cost wise. This was a Vectrex that had two layers of phosphor on the tube, a red layer and a green layer, and you ran the electron gun into the CRT at two different voltages, 18,000 and 25,000 volts."

However, the best-laid plans and all that: "Nice concept, worked well, except that going from 18,000 to 25,000 volts was too time consuming. And at 30,000 volts you burn a hole in the tube. If you look at the colour Vectrex [the sole prototype is always on display at CGE] you will see it has a nice little hole burnt in the phosphor!"



» The Japanese version of the Vectrex sold by Bandai.



» A complete boxed set of Kousokusen games.



» **Below:** Point and move and draw and play, the hardware was quite accurate. **Right:** Admittedly adverts seemed so exciting back then.



VECTREX

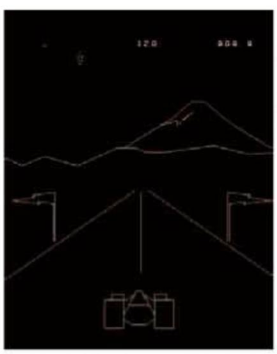


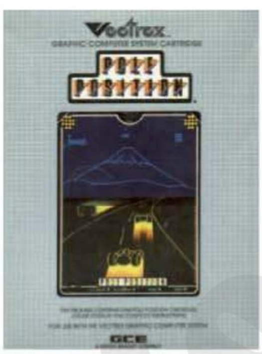
» A pay-per-play timed version of the Vectrex hardware that sprung up in bars and the such on the East coast.

Aside from scrapping the idea for a colour version, Cartabiano recalls other concepts that fell by the wayside. "Internally we loved this thing. We came back with ways to blow this thing out, be competitive, and keep us in this business. So we started on several campaigns, one was to take the basic technology and start to expand it. Jay was working on colour technology and a couple of other things so we left that to him, and we looked at the peripherals and we started making some of the same mistakes the other guys were doing. So we had developed a full QWERTY keyboard, and overlays for that, and a musical device that could play really bad music with speaker systems that could plug into it in really odd places. Then we had a voice-recognition module... we actually built a prototype for a baseball game on Vectrex, to call a pitch and a few other things, and played really badly."

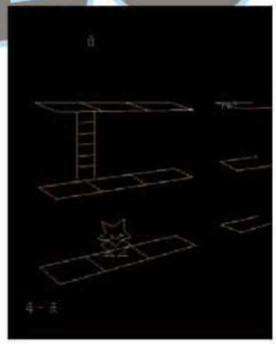
The two peripherals that did make it to sale were the lightpen and 3D Imager. The lightpen was a natural introduction given the technology available and the facilities of the Vectrex itself. Contrary to popular belief, the pen itself is actually a receiver, with the screen being scanned invisibly to find where it is positioned. As the joystick ports have a voltage line, this provided the input needed to power the pen itself. Three titles were released to take advantage of the device and it was met with reasonable success.

The 3D Imager is an interesting device mainly because as a piece of technology over 20 years old, it still works amazingly well and is still one of the best examples of 3D imaging, thanks to the efforts of designer John Ross. Thankfully to save having to use the old hardware and/or spend a lot of money acquiring it (originals sell for over £150 usually), a modern version has been developed in conjunction with new games taking advantage of what it can offer, namely depth of vision and colour. It's just a pity back then it launched dead, right at the start of 1984, and this is why the original





» *Pole Position*: Given the potential limitations of the hardware, not a bad conversion indeed.



» Help! Spike! Eek! Molly!



» Fortress of infuriating death at times, more like.

is hard to find today. *3D Minestorm* included with the unit and *Narrow Escape* especially are pretty good in their own right.

"By 1984, Vectrex succumbed to the entire problem that overcame the whole videogame industry at the time." Smith's conclusive statement really needs no more comment. A few months into the year, MB closed GCE and started to sell off the remainder of its stock at cut prices, with the unit down to $49 and games $10 each in the US by the summer. All this was really in preparation for the takeover by Hasbro that occurred in the May. Stock that wasn't sold was apparently landfilled in Springfield, Massachusetts according to Cartabiano.

Four years later Smith had the idea to resurrect the console as a handheld, taking the concept to Milton Bradley. "The thought at the time behind that was Sinclair had put out a device they called the flatscreen pocket TV. We hooked this up and made a Vectrex out of it [the tube]. MB thought about it, finally decided it would have to sell for about $100-110, so decided no, it could never sell anything like that. About a year and half later the Game Boy came out!"

And with that the Vectrex could have remained this curio console from the Eighties if it wasn't for the actions of two individuals. The first was Smith himself, for upon MB liquidating stock and closing GCE, he obtained all the rights to the hardware and software back into his own companies and now makes them available in the public domain for non-profit use. The other was John Dondzila, the first person to write a home-brew game for the Vectrex as he recalls, "Late 1995 following the various Vectrex Usenet threads, one of the most popular subjects was always someone who was going to develop their own Vectrex RAMcart and code games for the Vectrex. I decided I wanted to be that someone and the rest is history." In his stead, others have since followed.

Today the Vectrex scene keeps getting stronger with more people discovering what it has to offer and a dedicated group of individuals producing quality homebrew titles (see boxout). For a console that arrived late and died so early, it has risen like a phoenix to become one of those 'must-have' pieces of hardware.



Homebrew heaven

Given the Vectrex's small original library, it may come as no surprise that the homebrew scene is actually bigger by comparison. Since John Dondzila's first steps over ten years ago, the scene has developed into a vibrant, thriving community that constantly seeks to push forward the boundaries of the technology and what can be done with it. In return it has resulted in a dedicated voice synthesiser add-on, a replacement 3D Imager, flash memory cartridge and onboard battery saving.

But all this is nothing without the games. Such masterpieces as *Protector* by Alex Herbert, *I Cyborg* by George Pelonis, *Gravitrex* by John D, *Spike's Circus* by Alex Nicholson and *Nebula Commander* by Craig Akers are proof positive that today's developments are just as good, if not better, than those during the Eighties. Thankfully, most homebrew is still available to buy today so go search the web and support these guys in their efforts!



http://www.vectrexcarts.com
http://www.vectrex.biz
http://www.furyunlimited.com
http://www.vectorzoa.com
http://www.madtronix.com
http://www.classicgamecreations.com



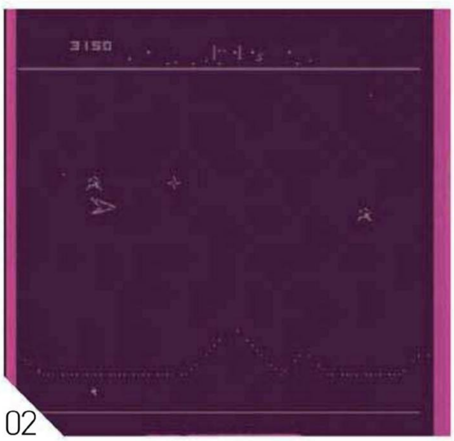
» The rarest and most valuable original release game available. Not bad to play either.

PERFECT TEN GAMES

The Vectrex only had 28 programs officially released for it, but over the years there have been some amazing homebrew titles created for it. Here's a selection of both…



01



02

SPACE WARS

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *MINESTORM REVIEW*

01 **Everyone knew *Space Wars* would make the top ten list, since it's not only a great adaptation of a timeless classic, it's also the purest distillation of the multiplayer gaming ethic.** Even today it's great fun and, while an obvious choice, is a title every Vectrex owner should get. Gameplay is elegantly simple: it's you and a rival ship, turn left or right, fire, accelerate, and warp; two ships enter, one ship leaves. Terrific in one-player (thanks to some decent AI), it's unstoppable with a friend. It's a title with many clever touches, like bits of ships getting shot off and becoming debris, or the central star's gravity affecting your speed. Brilliant.

PROTECTOR

» **RELEASED:** 2003
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** ALEX HERBERT
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *YASI*

02 **The best Vectrex game of all time? The most important Vectrex game of all time?** One thing is for sure, this superb *Defender* clone grabbed the community by the proverbial balls when first previewed and led many to believe it couldn't possibly be done on the hardware. How wrong they were. Alex Herbert's seminal tribute to Jarvis' classic is just one example of the untapped potential the machine held and the control scheme was a perfect fit to the Vectrex design. Thankfully now available in unlimited format, the original limited-release with custom-box and overlay – of which there were only 100 copies – has become one of the most expensive homebrews to acquire.

ARMOR ATTACK

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** DUNCAN MUIRHEAD
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *WEB WARS*

03 **A rocket-firing jeep, enemy tanks, and a terrifying helicopter, which isn't bound by buildings on the ground, are all trapped amongst the rubble of a ruined maze-like war zone.** It may not sound like much, but this is a tense little action title backed up by some excellent AI. Shots can't travel through walls, so it becomes a game of cat and mouse as you try to outmanoeuvre the enemy tanks attempting to flank you. When hit, though, tanks aren't always damaged – they can sometimes still move their turrets and return fire. Like the best videogames, it affects the imagination, conjuring up images from countless war films.

SPACE FRENZY

» **RELEASED:** 2006
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** JOHN DONDZILA
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *PATRIOTS, VECMANIA, GRAVITREX*

04 **With the Vectrex living such a short time and the wealth of vector arcade machines during that era, there are still opportunities to bring across to the home format.** John Dondzila's most current release is a homage to *Space Fury*, an obscure Sega/Gremlin title that took a lead from *Gorf* and gave you a taunting alien adversary. *Space Frenzy* as a game is almost identical to the arcade parent bar the colour, and plays fast and hard in the traditional 'shoot everything on screen before it gets you' genre. Though it also gives the player the opportunity to improve their shot power by docking with upgrades.

DARK TOWER

» **RELEASED:** N/A
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** JOHN HALL
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *MINESTORM II*

05 **Technically not an official release since it never came out, though a prototype was later found, dumped, and is now available on most multicarts.** Regardless, it's one of the best games on the system and, interestingly, is actually based on a 1981 board game by Milton Bradley. *Dark Tower* could be regarded as the system's first and only adventure RPG. The game has you wandering 3D fields of trees, opening treasure chests, avoiding tornadoes, and battling wicked mages. There might not be any saving, but it's a thrilling adventure and is still quite exciting now.



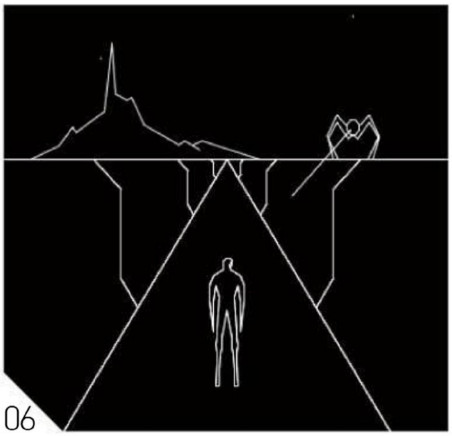
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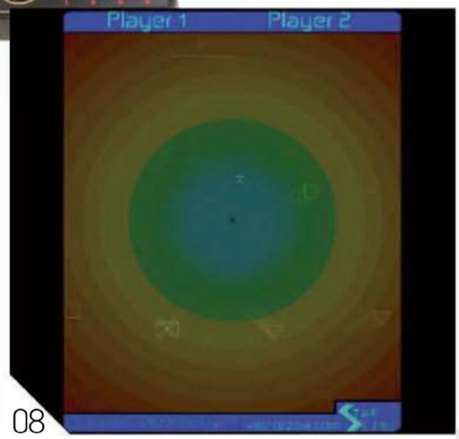
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08

CYBORG

» **RELEASED:** 2004
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** GEORGE PELONIS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *WAR OF THE ROBOTS, VECTOR 21*

06 One thing can be said about George Pelonis' output on the Vectrex, and that is it's not your average run-of-the-mill game idea. Everything he has done so far is just a little bit different, not something that has really been attempted in the past. I, *Cyborg*, while a name homage to a more well-known publication, is a highly challenging escape running game where you control the titular character in its attempt to break free of the prison he is locked inside. Unlike many other titles, this game fully uses the 32k memory space allocated and will keep most players occupied for a long time trying to complete it.

COSMIC CHASM

» **RELEASED:** 1982
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** BILL HAWKINS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *CRAZY COASTER 3D*

07 *Cosmic Chasm* captivates our minds because, considering it's a game from 1982, there is surprising depth to it – like trousers that appear normal, but have infinitely long legs. The basic premise is that you're trapped underground, in a massive maze-like cavern, but have a map charting your progress, and each cave has both enemies that try to kill you, and also a massive expanding central core. Luckily, you have a shield, lasers, and a drill with which to break down walls blocking your progress. The goal is to reach the core, blow it up, and then make your way back out of the caves before a chain reaction blows everything up.

STAR SLING

» **RELEASED:** 2006
» **PUBLISHED BY:** N/A
» **CREATED BY:** ALEX NICHOLSON
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** *LOGO, SPIKE'S CIRCUS*

08 Ever play *Quantum*? Most of you probably haven't, given it's an obscure low production run Atari coin-op. Alex Nicholson hadn't heard of it and yet managed to produce what would prove to be a natural evolution of the concept and a challenging game to boot. Floating in space, your little ship is equipped with a tractor beam and lasso-type weapon, the object being to ensnare on-screen like-shaped entities to destroy them. At the same time, you must avoid colliding with the shapes by using the tractor beam to match their velocity to pull you along. It's hard to explain but it becomes easy to understand when playing. And very hard then to stop playing.



09

SPIKE

» **RELEASED:** 1983
» **PUBLISHED BY:** GCE
» **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

09 *Spike* is an important game for many reasons. It's a platformer featuring a hedgehog, but one that isn't *Sonic*. It's also technically the only platformer on the Vectrex system. Then there's the fact that it has some awesome and unforgettable digitised speech – we chuckle every single time we hear "OH NO!" All this has led to Spike becoming something of an unofficial Vectrex mascot – and rightly so, since the game itself is awesome fun. It's essentially a clone of the arcade classic *Donkey Kong*, except slightly different. You need to use warping ladders to reach and collect a key, before climbing to the summit. You can also kick flying TVs that try to kill you. It's crazy!

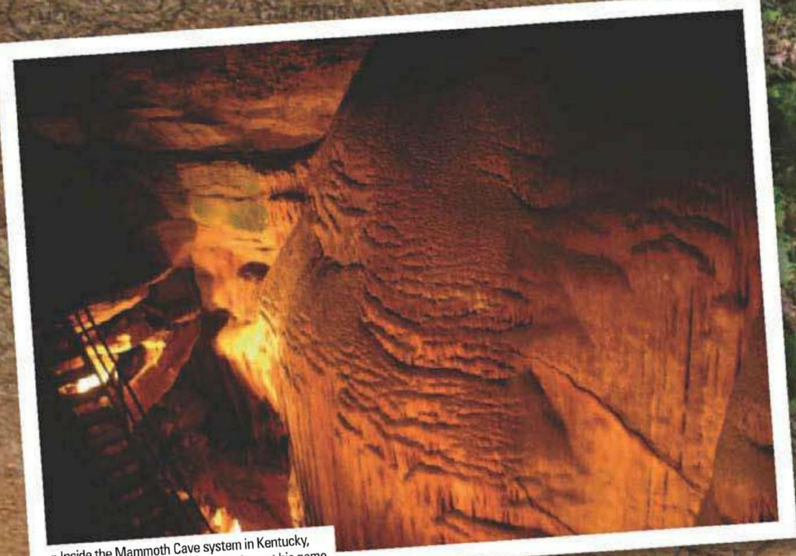
THRUST

» **RELEASED:** 2004
» **PUBLISHED BY:** MARK SHAKER
» **CREATED BY:** VILLE KRUMLINDE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** N/A

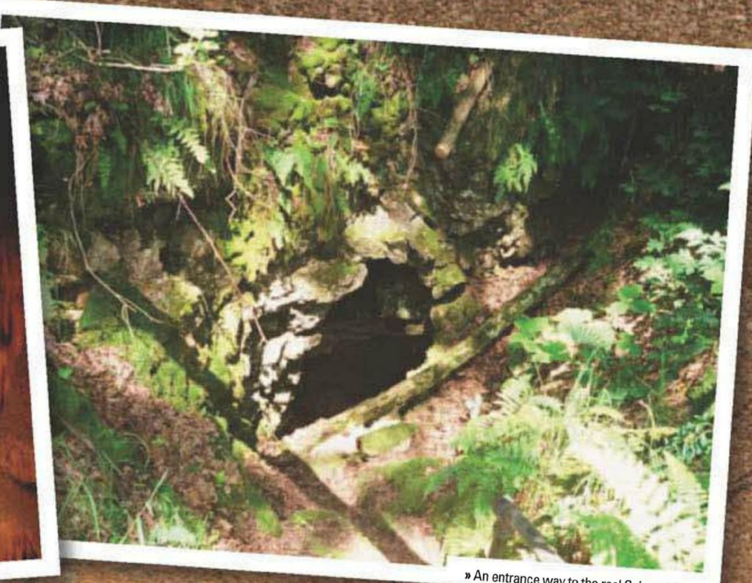
10 After doing the rounds in the Eighties and being resurrected for the Atari 2600, this vector based classic finally made the transition to its most natural home only as recently as 2004. Taking inspiration from the C64 version complete with translated Rob Hubbard soundtrack, it not only perfectly recreates the original but goes beyond the design with an additional rock hard difficulty level and Time Attack mode that will test even the most hardened *Thrust* players. Words are inadequate to be able to praise this game highly enough, with just the right balance between learned progression and challenging frustration evident with every turn, thrust and shot. In fact, the ultimate tribute to Jeremy Smith's genius.



10



» Inside the Mammoth Cave system in Kentucky, where Will Crowther was inspired to set his game.



» An entrance way to the real Colossal Cave.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

ORIGIN OF THE TEXT ADVENTURE GAME

THE TEXT-BASED ADVENTURE WAS THE CRUCIBLE IN WHICH RPG, ACTION, ADVENTURE, VIRTUAL WORLD AND EXPLORATION GAMES WERE FORGED. SEVEN GENERATIONS OF COMPUTER AND VIDEOGAMES HAVE BEEN TEMPERED IN THE FIRES OF ONE SINGLE TITLE, KNOWN SIMPLY AS ADVENTURE. WILL CROWTHER AND DON WOODS TELL US ABOUT THE GENESIS OF THE FIRST EVER TEXT ADVENTURE GAME.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** N/A

» **DEVELOPER:** WILL CROWTHER & DON WOODS

» **RELEASED:** 1975

» **GENRE:** TEXT ADVENTURE

» **FORMAT:** FORTRAN ON A DEC PDP-10

Throughout the Sixties and early Seventies, the notion of playing games on a computer had been toyed with, mainly by student hackers who found themselves with after-hours access to the behemoth systems of the day. Although Will Crowther may not have been a student, he unlocked the potential of the DEC PDP computer at MIT and, although he didn't know it at the time, ushered in a whole new generation of computer entertainment.

A WORLD WITHOUT GAMES

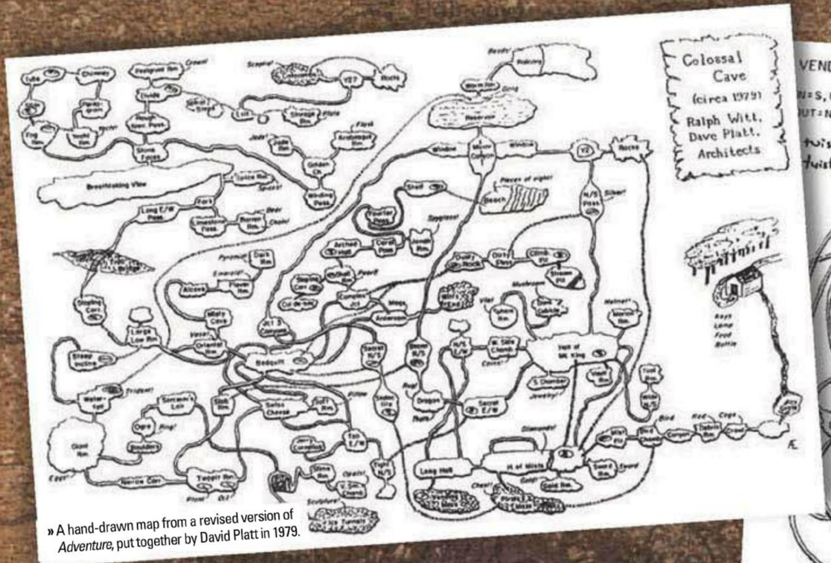
For Will Crowther and Don Woods, there was initially very little inspiration to suggest computers even had a future in the entertainment realm.

"I played all sorts of games, but there wasn't much in the way of computer games. Certainly no graphics. *Tic Tac Toe* and *Othello* were on a computer, and some solitaire games and bad chess. I'd experienced a manual role-playing game, where we mostly made up the rules as we went along." Crowther explains about his early experiences of computers.

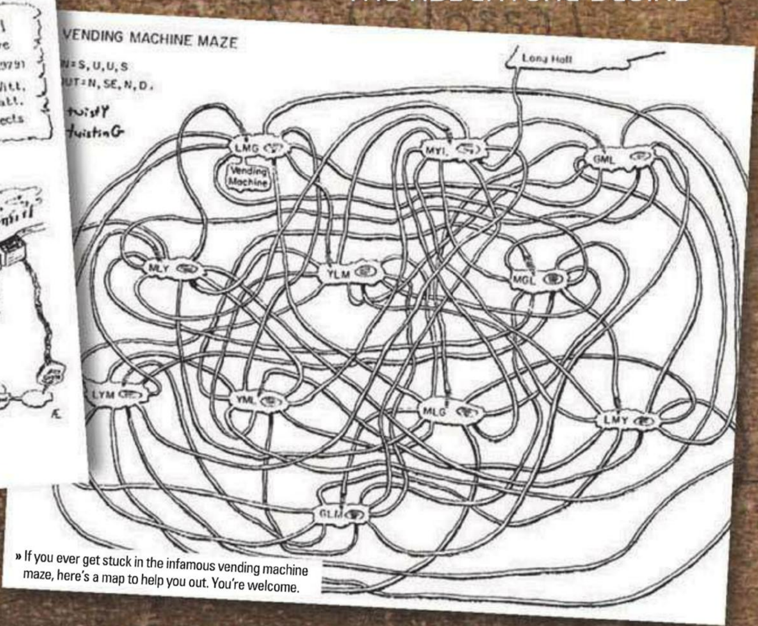
"At MIT in the late Fifties, computers were huge, and you either submitted runs (no fun there) or took the whole machine, but only a few could ever do that. My first job was working on a program to track incoming enemy airplanes (a jamming radar). There was a display, and the operator had to figure out from the patterns on the screen where the airplanes were. It was a game, of sorts!", laughs Crowther.

Although the two men had yet to meet, Don Woods had enjoyed a very similar introduction to the slowly merging worlds of computers and games. He told us about his own unique perspective on what made computers fun before the games appeared:

"I got interested in computers in the early Sixties, because my father was employed designing them. I would



» A hand-drawn map from a revised version of *Adventure*, put together by David Platt in 1979.



» If you ever get stuck in the infamous vending machine maze, here's a map to help you out. You're welcome.

occasionally help him double-check wiring diagrams. Yes, computers used real wires in those days, not integrated circuits! I wrote my first computer program at the age of 12, which was pretty much unheard of in that era. I didn't really think of them as 'entertainment', unless you mean the sort of entertainment provided by toys like Lego blocks, for example," said Woods.

A valid point about what drew people to dabble with computers in the first place: it was the hardware itself that provided the games and the puzzles. Deciphering how these new concepts in engineering and mathematics worked was enough of a challenge to encourage people like Crowther and Woods to explore the endless possibilities offered by computers.

The educational benefits of computer games were also something Crowther had seen the potential of, and provided the beginnings of his major work in designing a virtual world.

"I'd written some simple code for my kids. A program to help them learn typing, and a simple addition game, where if they could add two digits it would ring the Teletype bell. This was supposed to amuse them," recalls Crowther.

Don Woods' experiences as he got to know more about the new world of computer programming drew a distinct parallel with Crowther's.

"There were computer games" recalls Woods, "but I hadn't encountered them when I started programming. It was a year or so later before I ran across some games on a time-sharing system, like an all-text golf game. Certainly I'd always enjoyed playing card games and board games. I wrote some game programs for the computers my father was building – things like a roulette game and a program to generate three-dimensional mazes, but again, these were all done with text, not graphics."

WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!

By 1972, Will Crowther was working at Bolt, Beranek and Newman on the ARPANET project: the forerunner to the internet. In order to create a more immersive computer game for his daughters to play, Crowther had the notion of creating a simulation of the Mammoth Cave system in Kentucky using data he (a keen caver) had personally mapped. This 'virtual' cave was then inhabited by a plethora of dungeons, dragons and puzzles.

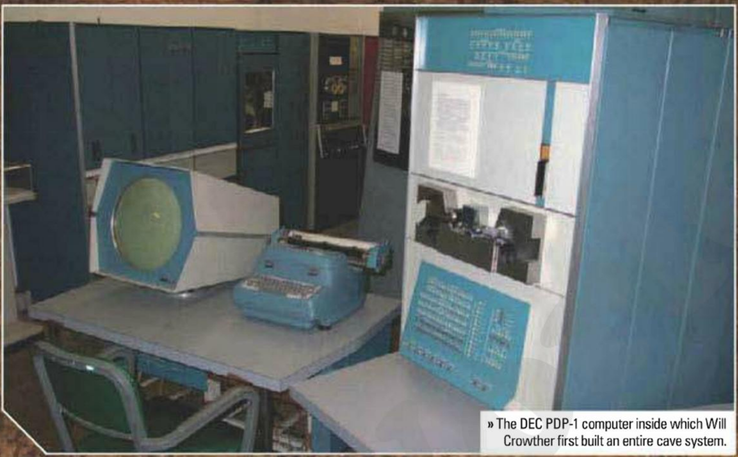
"It was always intended to be a game, not a virtual tour. I needed a backdrop, and I was cartographer for the Cave Research Foundation at the time. It seemed a good match. The role-playing dungeons of the time were usually set underground, so it seemed right." explains Crowther, who evidently harbours a talent for storytelling as much as programming. He continues:

"I wrote in Fortran on a PDP-1, using a remote Teletype over a phone line as a console. I never had any space problems, but then I was on a machine with virtual memory, and speed was never an issue. I had no idea what the size was, and didn't care. I never distributed anything," he recalls.

Showing simply as *'ADVENT'* on the BBN mainframe, Crowther's game began to steadily spread across the fledgling network (which consisted of several hundred computers). Network security and rogue programs were hardly an issue in 1975 and the game simply 'appeared' overnight on many machines. One such installation caught the eye of Don Woods.

"I'd never seen anything like it. There were a few 'natural language' based programs, such as ELIZA, but nothing that

"IT WAS VERY POPULAR AND BECAME NOTORIOUS FOR BRINGING UNIVERSITY COMPUTERS TO A HALT BECAUSE SO MANY COPIES OF IT WERE RUNNING ON THEIR MAINFRAME!"
WILL CROWTHER


» The DEC PDP-1 computer inside which Will Crowther first built an entire cave system.


» Don Woods: The man who went back into the cave and found the treasure.

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

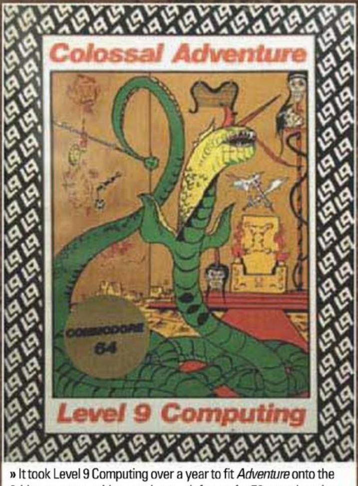
"I DIDN'T KNOW CROWTHER. A FELLOW GRADUATE STUDENT ... RAN ACROSS CROWTHER'S PROGRAM ON THE MED CENTRE'S COMPUTER. I HAVE NO IDEA WHO INSTALLED IT THERE" DON WOODS

simulated an actual environment. So I was quite fascinated by it, but immediately began thinking of ways to make it more interesting by adding more puzzles instead of having the game being mostly exploration," explains Woods, still excited about the first time he saw the application of computer programming he'd been looking for all his life. He told us how he put the ARPANET to work in locating the inspired Dungeon Master who had captured his imagination.

"I didn't know Crowther. A fellow graduate student at Stanford who had a job at the Medical Centre ran across Crowther's program on their computer. I have no idea who installed it there. The program mentioned 'Willie Crowther' as the person to contact with questions, so when I decided I wanted to modify *Adventure* I sent mail to 'crowther@xxx' for all computers on the ARPANET. I got several 'failed mail' responses, but eventually got a reply from Crowther." Wood's revised version was considerably more Tolkienian, offering more immersive gameplay, elaborate puzzles and a calculated scoring system. It was this version most people (many of whom went on to found the adventure game industry) knew and loved.

Despite becoming popularised as '*Colossal Cave Adventure*', that was a name that appeared further down the line in one of the many reprises the game saw over the years. Crowther told us about his original title for the game, which wound up christening the entire genre, instead.

"*Colossal Cave* was not my name. There is a real Colossal cave, part of the Mammoth cave system. A big cave like that has lots of names; Colossal cave is part of Flint Ridge, which is part of Mammoth cave, which has 350 miles of surveyed passage. Working the other way, Bedquilt is a small part of Colossal cave, with perhaps ten miles of passage. The *Adventure* game is set in Bedquilt, and all of the realistic cave features are part of Bedquilt. So I would have called it '*Bedquilt Cave Adventure*'. But someone else picked Colossal. Oh well. Bedquilt is just a hole in the ground where water disappears, so maybe Colossal isn't such a bad name!"


» It took Level 9 Computing over a year to fit *Adventure* onto the 8-bit cassettes, with enough room left over for 70 extra locations.

TWISTY LITTLE PASSAGEWAYS

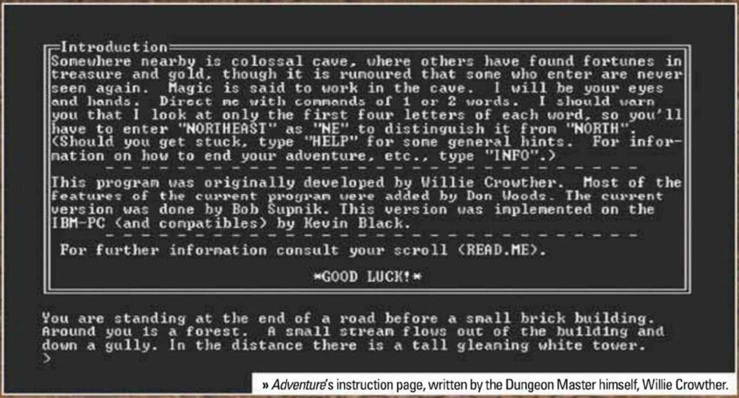
There were reports of cavers who'd heard about this remarkable computer application and sought out *Adventure* to see for themselves. Several have remarked that Crowther's virtual cave was such a precise representation of the Bedquilt section of the Mammoth system that, even though they'd never been to the actual cave before, they were able to find their way around after playing *Adventure*. Crowther told us more:

"It was accurate, but not complex. As part of my role as cartographer, I had produced a large and accurate map of a small but complex part of Mammoth Cave, which featured seven levels, stacked one approximately above the other. Wherever they crossed there was usually a junction. I described the junctions in the game and gave the player a choice of directions to follow to the next junction. I've been told that at least one player who'd never been in that part of the cave recognised the junctions and the passages between them." Although Crowther takes it well in his stride, this is no small achievement and one that has rarely been replicated even today.

» *Adventure* was first distributed among members of DECUS: a volunteer run user group founded by pioneering computer manufacturer, Digital Entertainment Corporation.

The foundations upon which Don was building might not have realised their full potential at that point, but they were solid. Woods could see beyond the passageways and tunnels to the fantastical world waiting to break through. Initially he realised the code needed some alteration before it would be ready to bring his new world to life.

"It wasn't all that difficult a process. The overall structure was there. I rewrote a lot of Will's program because I wanted to be able to do more complex things without having to write lots of special-case code. In Will's program, there was a data file that specified things like "moving in direction X from location Y takes you to location Z", but if there was anything special about it, such as "only if the crystal



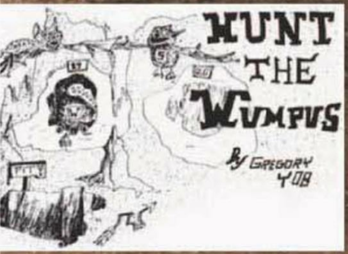
» *Adventure*'s instruction page, written by the Dungeon Master himself, Willie Crowther.

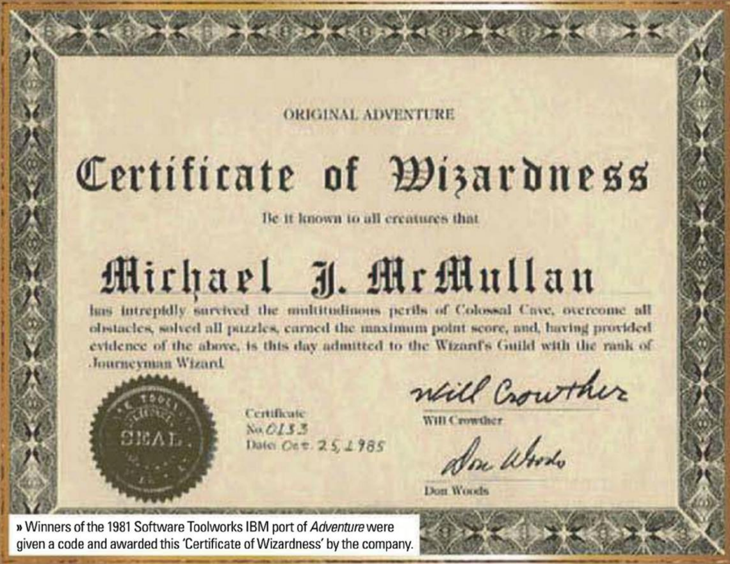
HUNT THE WUMPUS

Not so much as a forerunner to *Adventure* as a component inspiration, the historically significant *Hunt The Wumpus* was a hide-and-seek text-based puzzle game. Its creator, Gregory Yob, had seen a variety of Battleship-styled computer games from People's Computer Company and envisaged a game environment shaped like a dodecahedron (he had once built a kite in that formation and was partial to the shape) divided up into rooms. Each room adjoined other rooms, or featured a game-ending device like a pit or the mysterious Wumpus creature.

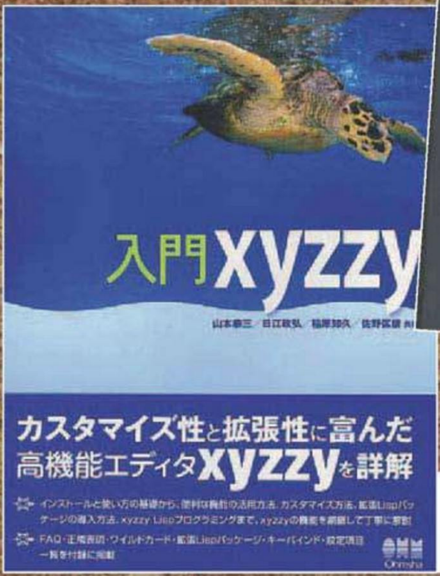
The player would navigate their way through the system of rooms and work out where the Wumpus was hiding. Shooting an arrow into a room before entering had one of two effects: either the Wumpus was killed (if present in the room), or it was startled and changed rooms, possibly killing the player in the process.

Sadly, Gregory Yob died in 2005 in San Paolo, where his head was placed in neurosuspension at the Alcor cryogenics facility.





» Winners of the 1981 Software Toolworks IBM port of *Adventure* were given a code and awarded this 'Certificate of Wizardness' by the company.





» The original disk box of Microsoft's 1979 PC, TRS-80 and Apple II versions of *Adventure*.

» The magic word 'xyzzy' has even migrated as far as Japan. Here it lends its name to a Japanese text editor for Windows.

bridge exists", Will's data file just specified, "command requires special code N", and the program then contained special code to test the condition.

I wanted to be able to build those things, and more complex puzzles, into the game without having to write special code for every situation. So I spent a while redesigning the format of the data file, and rewriting the program to use the new one. Then I was able to start adding more puzzles." After Wood's redesign, *Adventure* took on a whole new life and was more actively promoted by the DEC user's community known as DECUS. The game spread like wildfire and its popularity was immediately redoubled. Crowther recalls the reaction he saw to the new improved *Adventure*.

"I think Don did a great job. My notion of winning the game was just getting all the treasures back out of the cave, whereas Don realised it would be more fun to have a running score. Good idea! It was very popular and became notorious for bringing university computers to a halt because so many copies of it were running on their mainframe!"

TREASURE FROM THE CAVE

For all their hard work and revolutionary thinking, *Adventure* never really made any money for its two creators, despite going on to become a cornerstone for all forms of explorative, virtual world games that followed. Yet neither of them seems in the least perturbed by the matter, as Crowther blithely explains.

"We happily set it free. We made a little money by endorsing one of the versions for the PC – I think they felt a little guilty. I suppose today someone would patent it, and demand royalties from every game. Back then, such an attitude would probably have killed it," says Crowther, content with having provided so many hours of entertainment to other early computer hackers like himself. Woods is of a similar opinion:

"We made some small amounts and got a few free dinners over the years. Will and I received some modest royalties for our endorsement of a version published by Software Toolworks, but for the most part we simply set it loose and made it available for free. I had a grand time building the game." smiles Woods.

> "THE FOUNDATIONS UPON WHICH DON [WOODS] WAS BUILDING MIGHT NOT HAVE REALISED THEIR FULL POTENTIAL AT THAT POINT, BUT THEY WERE SOLID"

It feels somehow reassuring to know that such a massively significant contribution to what became a horrendously avaricious industry began and ended with beneficent motives. If today's industry leaders could only follow the trail of breadcrumbs laid down by pioneers such as Will Crowther and Don Woods, they might find their way out of the maze of twisty little passageways and once again see the sun.

Special thanks to Rick Adams for providing pictures. For more info on *Adventure*, check out Rick's page here: www.rickadams.org/adventure/

WHAT'S THE MAGIC WORD?

Adventure has not only influenced countless other genres, but aspects of the game have permeated the entire hacker culture. The most significant is the magic word, 'xyzzy'. Despite much conjecture, its origin is remarkably simple. Will told us more:

"I wanted a unique magic word, and was considering working for Xerox at the time so words with letters near the end of the alphabet came to mind." Next on the list is 'plugh' – the meaning of which has been subjected to even more speculation than xyzzy. A popular belief is that, due to the nature of its use in the game, it's a truncated version of the word 'plughole'. Will's answer put an end to that theory:

"What's a plughole? Did Don make up that one? I like the spelling."

Over to you, Don: "I'm afraid this may be lost to the mists then, because I felt sure 'plugh' was in Will's version of the game." Oh well. That only leaves the mysterious 'plover' and its enigmatic eggs. This is one of Don's.

"I'm not sure where I originally encountered the phrase "a gem as big as a plover's egg" – presumably in a book or movie – but it obviously stuck with me and I used it to describe one of the treasures, which led to calling the room the 'Plover Room'. As that part of the cave evolved, a magic word was needed, and the choice seemed obvious."





» The Plover: a wading bird that lives on the shoreline and has a short bill and tail and long pointed wings (Encarta).

THE MAKING OF...



SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

With a sequel to Hit The Road now here, Ashley Day thought it was high time to track down Steve Purcell, the creator of Sam & Max, and speak to him about the making of one of the funniest graphic adventures of all time.









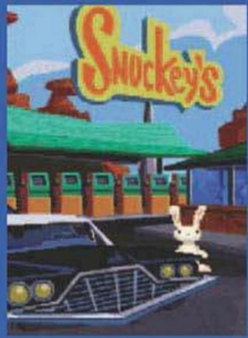


» Who would have thought a game starring a psychotic bunny and a sleuthing dog would be so popular?

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** LUCASARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **GENRE:** GRAPHIC ADVENTURE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-£25

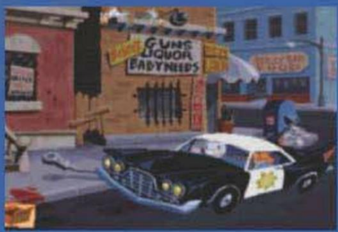


"MAX WAS A COMPLETELY NAKED BUNNY RABBIT WITH A SET OF TEETH THAT WOULD PUT THE SHARK FROM JAWS TO SHAME"

Great double acts are commonplace in the world of film, television and comedy, but videogames have very few duos that stick out and, as far as we're concerned, there's only one such pairing that are worth mentioning... and we don't mean *Firo & Klawd*. Whether they were gracing the pages of a comic book, the television screen or a PC monitor, *Sam & Max* was the strangest of teams. With his trademark suit and dry wit, Sam was a typical gumshoe, except, of course, he was a floppy-eared dog, while his sidekick Max was a completely naked bunny rabbit with a set of teeth that would put the shark from Jaws to shame. The pair starred in LucasArts' *Sam & Max Hit The Road*: yet another hilarious adventure game in which the two 'hit the road' in search of a missing Yeti. Along the way they found themselves visiting some bizarre tourist hotspots like the world's biggest ball of twine and an alligator-infested crazy golf course. The game was both a showcase for the madcap title characters as well as a parody of America's more weird and wonderful tourist sights.

The 1987 comic '*Monkeys Violating the Heavenly Temple*' was the first appearance of Sam and Max, courtesy of creator Steve Purcell. "My brother made up a pair of characters called Sam and Max when he was a kid", recalls Steve. "My version grew out of my own cruel parodies of his comic books. At some point he lost interest and I continued drawing them. Over the years, *The Blues Brothers* and *Penn & Teller* have also had an influence on *Sam & Max*, and one of our family cars was a dead ringer for Sam and Max's Sixties patrol car." The comic soon gained a strong cult following and eventually grabbed the attention of a handful of employees at LucasArts. "Ken Macklin, an artist at what was then called LucasFilm Games recommended me, based on my first *Sam & Max* comic, to the art director Gary Winnick." I started on a role-playing game that was cancelled shortly after I was hired and found myself without a job. Fortunately, they hired me back to paint the *Zak McKraken* box cover. After that, I worked on animation for *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*. Working at a game company on Skywalker Ranch was like going away to geek summer camp. It was great."

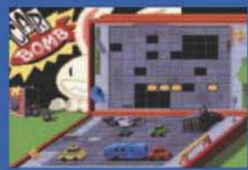
It was only a matter of time until *Sam & Max* was transported from the comic page to the computer screen. LucasArts had been churning out ever more amusing games (most notably *The Secret Of Monkey Island*), and Purcell's wisecracking duo were perfect for the relaxed pace of the genre. "The way Sam and Max work best is that you need to spend time with them as characters. You get used to the way they interact with each other the way you do with a friend when you come to speak a common language of references and shorthand." In 1992, LucasArts set about creating a *Sam & Max* adventure and with only seven and a half months until release, Purcell and the team needed to



» The only "white knuckle" adventure ever made?

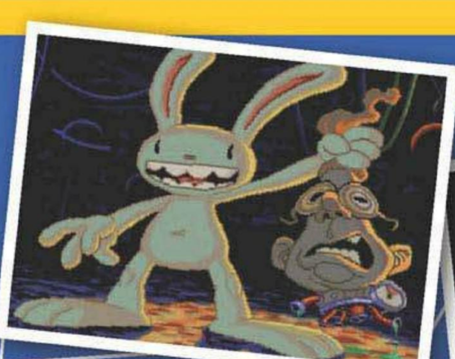


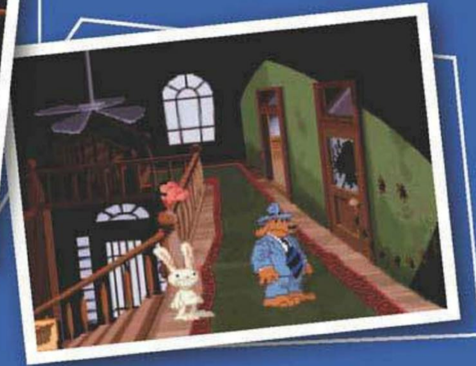
» One of *Hit The Road*'s many over-the-top mini-games.



» *Battleships*, but with much more cultural relevance to kids of the Nineties.

THE MAKING OF... SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD







ROADSIDE AMERICANA

British gamers may have seen *Sam & Max's* bizarre tourist attractions as the surreal imaginings of the LucasArts designers, but our American cousins will have recognised them for the parodies of real American landmarks that they are. From shoe trees to miniscule churches, there's a whole world of weird along America's highways that had an influence on *Hit The Road*, the most notable of which is the world's largest ball of twine. Measuring over 7 million feet in length, the giant ball of twine has been diligently wound by the citizens of Cawker City, Kansas, for the past 53 years. Though minuscule in comparison to *Sam & Max's* ball of twine that, according to the game, would reach to Jupiter if laid out end to end, Cawker City's spectacular ball is a great example of the insane America that Purcell wanted to capture in *Hit The Road*.

"WORKING AT A GAME COMPANY ON SKYWALKER RANCH WAS LIKE GOING AWAY TO GEEK SUMMER CAMP"

get a story in place incredibly quickly. "We employed storyboarding for the first time at LucasArts, mostly because we needed to plan ahead to keep everyone busy", says Purcell, who came up with the story by adapting the comics and incorporating events from his own life. "I love the book *Roadside America*, which is a hilarious travelogue of America's goofiest tourist stops. My childhood road trips across the US with my family also helped inspire my second comic as well as *Hit The Road*."

The *Sam & Max* comics were quite adult in tone and there was always the possibility that LucasArts would want to cut back some of the edgier material for the game, but Purcell was very pleased with how much they allowed him to stick to his original vision. "I think the game is really close to the spirit of the comics. There's violence, mild cursing and a commendable lack of respect for authority, not to mention circus freaks and yetis. There's less gunplay in the game simply because a gun is a terrible object to give someone to use in an adventure game unless you carefully guide the player to use it in a more interesting way than just shooting. I don't remember anything getting cut by management. Much to their credit, I think they trusted our judgement."

With the story in place, and relatively unmolested, it was time to carve the narrative into an enjoyable video game. With the aid of fellow game designers Sean Clark, Michael Stemmle and Collette Michaud, who had all previously worked on *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*, Purcell was charged with the difficult task of creating a game that got the balance between story and puzzling just right. "You try to be aware of the amount of time you have players sitting and watching as opposed to interacting. Fortunately, a lot of the humour came out of the way that the characters would respond to the player's actions. Even observing something in the room could produce a funny response, in which case the interactivity *is* doing the work of the story."

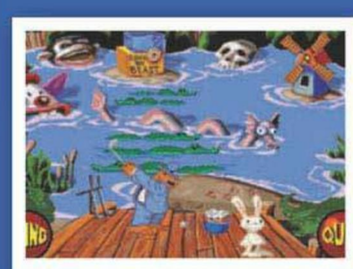
Not content with merely weaving humour into a series of puzzles, the *Sam & Max* team decided that the SCUMM engine, which had powered all of LucasArts' adventure games since *Maniac Mansion* in 1987, was due for a spring clean. A single mouse pointer, the function of which could be cycled through by clicking the right mouse button, replaced the traditional method of selecting a verb from the bottom of the screen then clicking on an item and/or location. This freed up screen space to expand on the excellent backgrounds and also made interaction much quicker and less laborious than previous games. In Purcell's opinion as a writer, there were other advantages to the loss of verb lists and dialogue trees: "It may have been Mike Stemmle who first proposed the icon-based interface. I think it's great for a game that's driven by a lot of verbal gags. Nothing would kill a joke worse than reading it before you hear it."

By this stage the game could have been considered complete and ready to roll out to players, but Purcell still had a couple of innovations up his sleeve. LucasArts was very aware that difficulty peaks in the puzzles meant that adventure games could often 'bottleneck', leaving players with nothing to do if they were stuck for too long. To alleviate the staccato pace of the adventure, Purcell added several mini-games to *Hit The Road*, such as 'Car Bomb': a suitably dark version of battleships. "They were meant so that when you were tired of trying to solve obscure puzzles you could take a break and play something short and silly", explains Purcell, "I liked having a grab bag of content so you could jump from thing one to another and try something different."

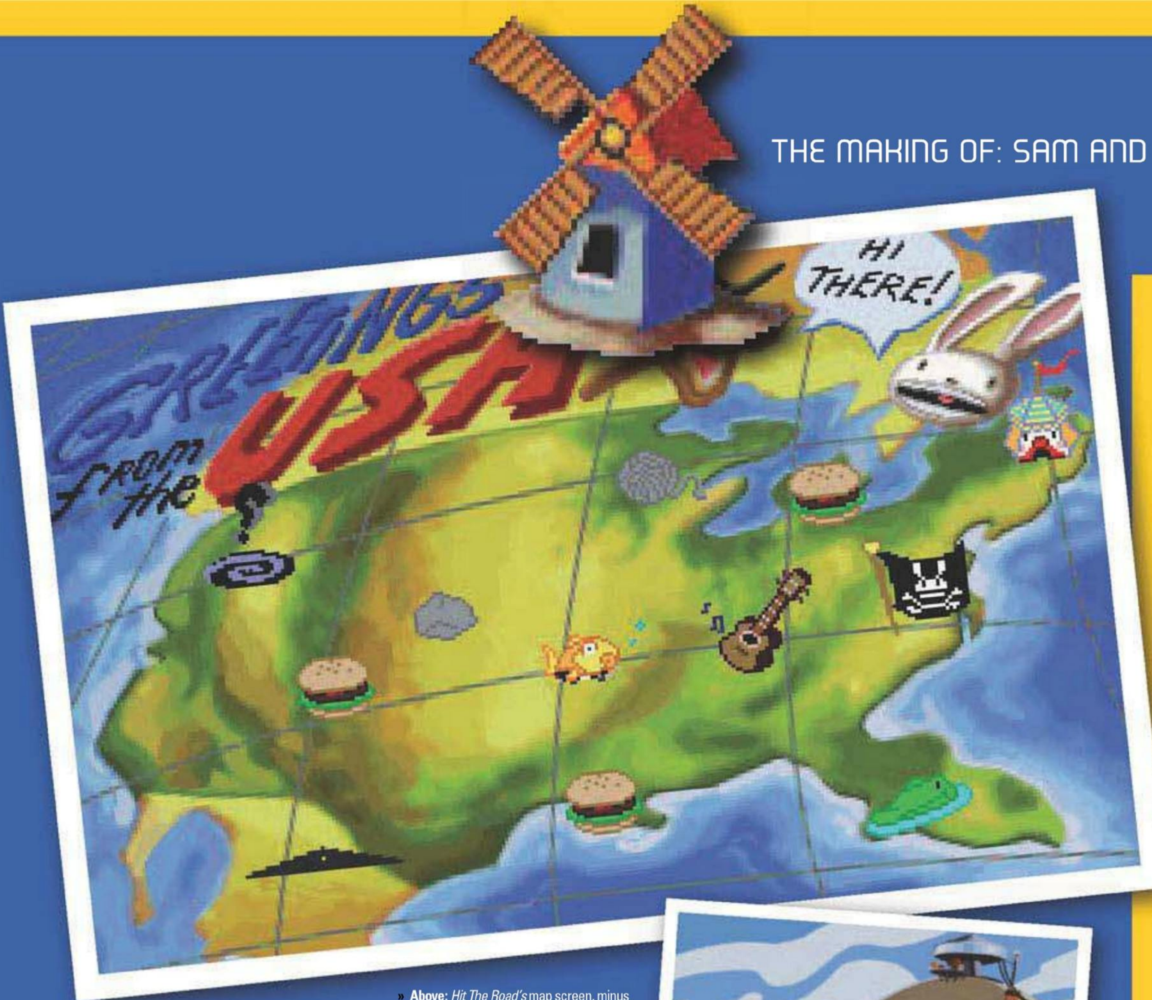
As well as the floppy disk version, *Sam & Max Hit The Road* was due to be released on CD-ROM and, as such, was to be one of the first adventures to feature a full speech

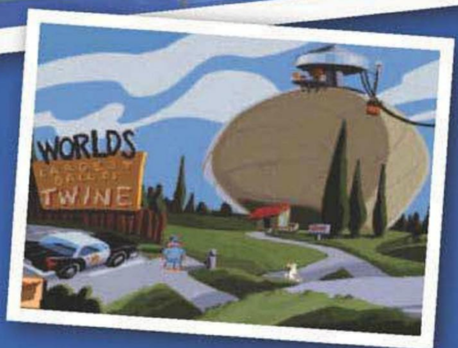


» Why did none of the humans question *Sam & Max's* animal appearance?



» Quite possibly the strangest version of Crazy Golf you'll ever play…





» **Above:** *Hit The Road's* map screen, minus the sound of screeching tyres. **Right:** We hope they have good fire insurance.

soundtrack. For Steve Purcell this was a dream opportunity to hear his creations' voices for the first time. "I always thought of Donald Sutherland as Sam. He sounds big and intelligent but with a bit of a lisp that gives him sincerity. Although Bill Farmer sounds nothing like Donald Sutherland, I liked his demo tape because it was very dry. He wasn't trying too hard to sell the lines and he made me laugh. I call his Sam 'Johnny Carson crossed with Jack Webb' – two people that a lot of your audience have probably never heard of." For the record, Johnny Carson was the original presenter of *The Tonight Show* and Jack Webb created and starred in the TV police drama *Dragnet*.

By the time of its release in early 1993, *Sam & Max* had two hysterical central characters, an innovative interface, exciting speech and a strong backbone of traditionally obscure puzzles. LucasArts' latest classic was incredibly popular with adventure fans and, no doubt due to Purcell's likeable characters, had some crossover success with those who wouldn't normally buy a point-and-click game. "I'm probably still not allowed to reveal sales figures, but over the years it's sold much better than any of the marketing projections. I remember a lot of people seemed to appreciate the weirdness of it when it came out, but others were confused, thinking it was meant to be a cutesy kid's game. *Hit The Road* won some awards that year and was on *Entertainment Weekly*'s top ten list for best software."

Sam & Max certainly stood out from the other LucasArts adventures. No other title had let you control two characters at once and, although some of the older games were amusing, every single line of dialogue in this game was outrageously funny. Purcell has his own thoughts on why *Hit The Road* stood out from its stablemates: "I think it has the impression of being edgier and meaner, because of the language and aggressiveness of the characters, but as with the characters themselves it's mostly bluster. Most of the violence and aggression is hearsay, not really played out."

The game's popularity has stayed strong for the last 15 years. Re-releases have kept it on the shelves and ScummVM has opened up virtually every platform to its charms. Purcell couldn't be happier that his game is still being enjoyed despite the advance of technology: "I'm always amazed that people are still playing *Sam & Max* after all these years. I know that it's been fan-ported to PSP as well, and I'm told the old graphics look great on that little screen. I meet grown people who first played *Sam & Max* when they were little kids and still take time to revisit it or share it with their friends. Sort of makes it all worthwhile."



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Sam & Max: Freelance Police (PC, Cancelled)
Sam & Max Season 1 (PC, 2007)



THE REUNION TOUR

After LucasArts announced *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* in 2004 and scrapped it again just as quickly, you would be forgiven for believing that everyone's favourite dog and rabbity-thing would never return to our screens again. Not so! When the rights to the characters reverted back to Steve Purcell in 2005, he and several ex-LucasArts staff hooked up with Telltale Games to create a series of brand new *Sam & Max* adventures. Released episodically in TV-style 'seasons', it is reassuring to know that Purcell and team are back on the case and that the new games are just as funny and entertaning as *0*. Telltale has previously worked on some of the popular *CSI* games, as well as the episodic *Bone* series. While not enduring the painful wait between episodes, be sure to check out Steve's new *Sam & Max* comic that can be found at www.telltalegames.com, along with all the latest news on the new series.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION
SYSTEMS: PC, APPLE II, AMIGA, COMMODORE 64, NES, FAMICOM
YEAR: 1987

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEMS: PC, AMIGA, MAC, SEGA CD
YEAR: 1990

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PC, AMIGA, MAC
YEAR: 1992



THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

ADVENTURE? EXCITEMENT? A JEDI CRAVES NOT THESE THINGS.



- **PUBLISHER:** PARKER BROTHERS
- **RELEASED:** 1982
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ATARI 2600
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+



HISTORY

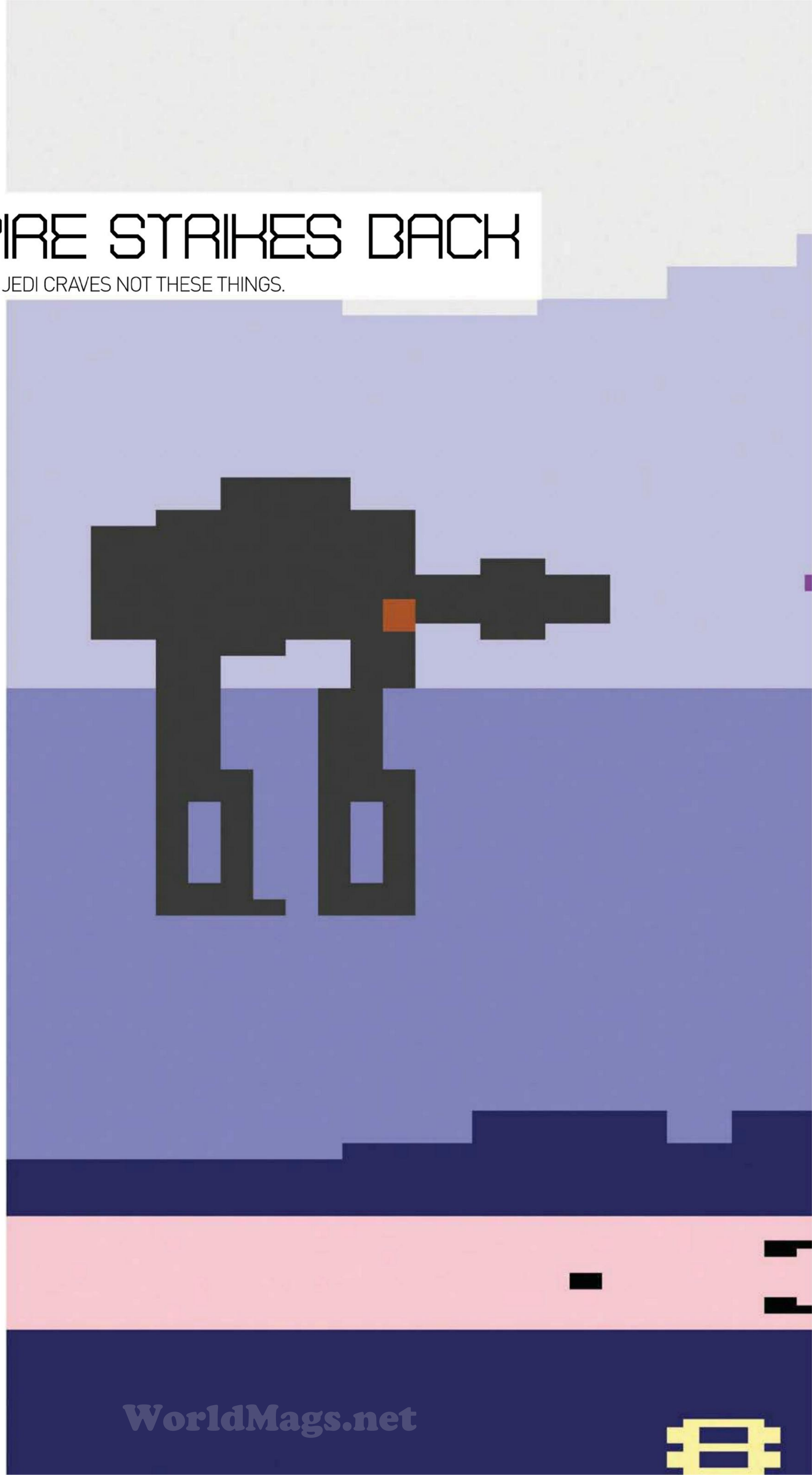
Significant not only as the first ever *Star Wars* themed videogame, but also the first ever movie licence tie-(fighter)-in, this superb 1982 Parker Brothers title was certainly more of a critical success than a commercial one. Still, the small re-enactment of the Imperial invasion of Hoth quickly garnered a strong following of *Defender* migrants looking for a more dynamic strain of the increasingly popular shmup to play on their beloved Atari 2600s.

Taking to the cockpit of Luke's Snowspeeder, it's the player's job to circle the ice deserts outside the Rebel base and attempt to repel the ominous, lumbering AT-ATs that are attempting to reach the power generator and thwart the pitiful band of rebels, before the Ewoks get to jump in and take down the galactic Empire with sticks and stones.

Not an easy game, it takes no less than 48 hits to bring down a single AT-AT, while the feeble Snowspeeder can sustain just two direct shots from the four-legged Imperial juggernauts. Landing the fragile craft for a brief period gives the stalwart pilot and his gunner the opportunity to enact a few on-the-spot repairs. Keeping a keen eye out for the behemoth's weak spot at the creaking neck hinge can present the opportunity to bring them to their knees a little more efficiently (this red spot may be supposed to represent the bomb hatch; I can't be sure).

Avoiding damage for an indeterminate amount of time (suffice to say it's too long to easily achieve) sparks off the invigorating movie theme tune, determining the "Force is with you" and rendering the redoubtable snow craft invincible for a few wonderful moments.

Amazingly, it would seem the Atari 2600's Lego-tastic graphics were made for generating *Star Wars* machinery, as a few simple pink boxes create a perfectly serviceable rendition of a Snowspeeder, while the AT-ATs remained as unmistakable as ever. Good on an emulator, and superb after an invigorating eBay bidding war, the first ever *Star Wars* game set the bar particularly high for the onslaught of officially licensed mundanery that followed.







DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



SNK (PART TWO)

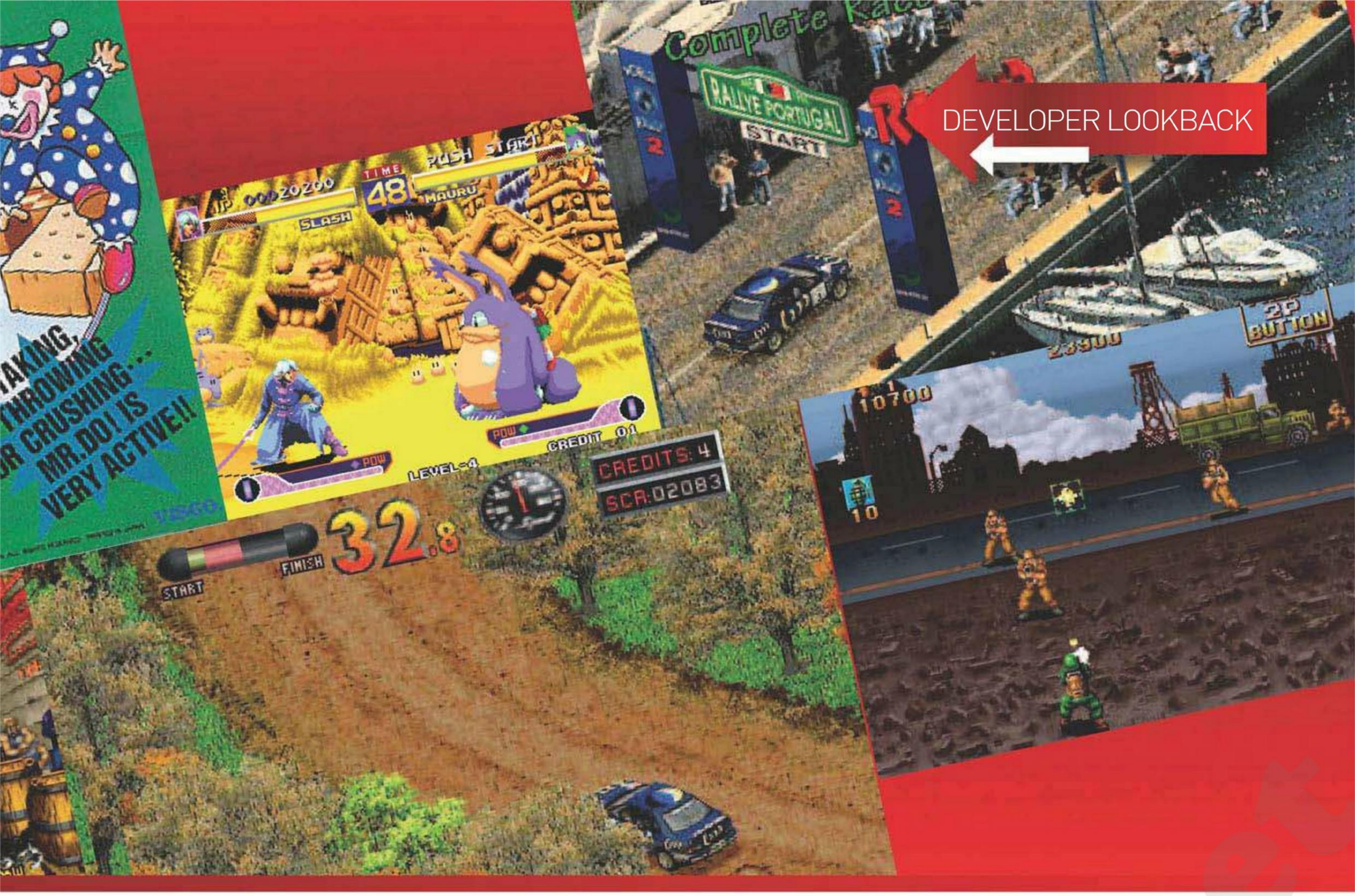
THROUGHOUT THE EIGHTIES WE WITNESSED SNK EMERGE FROM MODEST ORIGINS ONTO THE WORLD STAGE. IT WOULD BE THE NINETIES, HOWEVER, THAT WOULD SEE KAWASAKI'S SNK BECOME THE EMBODIMENT OF HIS DREAMS, AND SUBSEQUENT NIGHTMARE. MIKE TOOLEY CONTINUES HIS HISTORIC ODYSSEY.

Unlike many software companies of the late Eighties and early Nineties, SNK found itself on a steady financial footing. Its business was complex and its games solid, bolstered by a clever distribution network that prolonged each game's shelf life.

Eikichi Kawasaki and Paul Jacobs surveyed the Nineties as frontiersmen. Looking behind them they could see a short but rich heritage with which to garner confidence, while around them much of the gaming industry was laid waste and in front lay an uncharted decade, a decade with no boundaries.

Kawasaki explains it as a turning point where SNK could finally lay to rest the ghost of Eighties anonymity. "We believe our business watershed was 1990 when we established and released the Neo Geo MVS [Multi Video System]. To have our own hardware, we could succeed in the arcade business using this system and we could establish our SNK brand worldwide." Loved by arcade owners for their price and changeability, the MVS units also featured a control system that was standard across many cabinets, allowing gamers to build a familiarity with the interface that they could previously only get at home. Coupled with the large, colourful sprites on display, SNK was onto a winner the world over.

The name Neo Geo came from the mindset inside SNK Japan at the time, as Kawasaki explains: "Neo Geo means 'New Frontier' in Latin. When we developed this system, we invited some suggestions internally and one of our development staff put forward the name 'Neo Geo'. We're trying to establish our new system in the arcade business field and all our management agreed that the name was perfect." MVS would secure SNK's immediate arcade future and, with companies like Taito and Alpha Denshi jumping on board, would house titles of a pedigree without peer.



The home market was, at that time, going through a major transition. Where only a few years earlier the industry had witnessed home micros replace consoles as the machines of choice, Sega, Nintendo and Hudson had reversed this trend. The NES was huge the world over, and the PC Engine delivered massive sales to the Japanese and US market, but it was Sega that really caught Kawasaki's attention. Sega had just released the Genesis (aka Mega Drive), itself a revolution in its technology. However, it wasn't the machine but Sega's ideal that inspired Kawasaki. Where SNK had a solid arcade performance through the Eighties, Sega dominated; nobody at that time was even close. And when Sega said that the Genesis was to bring the arcade experience home to gamers, Kawasaki understood why more than most. Frustrated at seeing SNK titles being watered down for the home market, Kawasaki knew that if he could get the MVS into homes, he would be onto a sure winner.

SNK Japan set their R&D lab to work on creating the Neo Geo home console. Originally released for use in hospitality venues such as hotels or as a rental console, the Neo Geo Advanced Entertainment System quickly garnered a following and was soon released to mainstream Japan. Initially targeted at adult gamers with large disposable incomes, the AES was possibly the most loaded console ever to be launched, even by today's standards. No compromises were made in the transition from the MVS at all. The CPU, sound and graphics easily outperformed the Genesis and SNES; it wasn't until the PlayStation that a more powerful machine would come along.

The AES came with two whopping controllers, each 30 centimetres by 20 centimetres. Weighing in at just under two kilograms, it was also the first console to have a memory card and slot built in. It epitomised early Nineties refinement with Eighties brash. Each game would proclaim its ROM size on the box and cartridge, and while Nintendo and Sega games cartridges were just reaching 16 megabits, AES cartridges frequently reached over 100 megabits, earning the '100 Mega Shock' logo its relevance. The cartridges were as big as hardback books, while the AES had 'MAX 330 MEGA PRO-GEAR SPEC' emblazoned across its front. Owning the AES was like owning a US stock car, a machine sprayed with sound bites that occluded the mighty grunt hidden beneath.

For all its promise, getting the AES to multiple markets proved to be an uphill struggle. Paul Jacobs fought furiously with SNK Japan to get a US release for AES; this battle would eventually become the impetus for his departure. SNK Japan was reticent about releasing AES to mass market for two main reasons, the first being the prohibitive manufacturing costs if the machine didn't find an audience. Secondly, post Black Wednesday, the US and European economies were still in recession. All parties agreed that there should be no compromises with the hardware, effectively putting AES beyond the reach of all but a few consumers in the West. Eventually SNK Japan succumbed to Jacobs, as he sold them on a cautious launch strategy that would see a limited number of machines made and sold through the US market before production would start on more machines.

A second US arm of SNK was created as SNK Home Entertainment Inc, the first time SNK had opened a company without a proven sales base. Jacobs appointed John Barone to run operations. Barone didn't have the same pedigree as Jacobs or Kawasaki, but was viewed as being easier to manage. A company man, Barone would always put SNK first. Kent Russell was appointed VP of marketing and would run all of SNK America's marketing operations, developing some of the most distinctive campaigns that videogaming had ever seen. Russell believed that gamers weren't kids any

THE GAME LORD SPEAKETH

One of Kent Russell's innovations at SNK was to introduce game counsellors to the US. A step up from the helplines that Nintendo had in place, these guys were masters of the games that they advised on, and were keen to recommend other games for SNK systems while capturing feedback from the gamers that would be sent to the development teams. The most notable of these would be Chad Okada. Initially employed as a game counsellor, Russell soon spotted his potential and within a couple of years of joining SNK, Chad would write the box art for repackaged US games. Under the guise of 'The Game Lord', Chad would appear at game shows the world over, demonstrating the latest SNK games and meeting show attendees.

With regular editorials appearing in the gaming press Chad, in his persona as The Game Lord, soon became a celebrity on the SNK scene. While other figures from that golden period in the history of SNK would move on to senior roles with other companies, Chad's departure took him to Sony where he developed *Cardinal Sin* for the PlayStation, and was heavily involved in the development of *Twisted Metal 4*. Eventually Sony created a role specifically for Chad, where he was to tailor SNK games to the US market, correcting the notoriously bad grammar and adding features such as a level select.



» The massive AES cart and packaging.

» The briliant *Last Blade* is superb.

» *Fatal Fury* only allowed three fighters initially.

» *Samurai Shodown 2* demonstrated the capabilites of MVS and AES.

» *Street Fighter II* offered a selection of eight fighters.

» *The King Of Fighters '96* is generally considered to be one of the best outings.

AGGRESSORS OF DARK KOMBAT

With the arcade and home divisions, plus a raft of great games in tow, it must have been difficult to see where a company as robust as SNK was in the early Nineties could actually fail. The answer, however, can be seen in many places. Fundamentally Sega and Namco had changed the arcades with their 3D wizardry. While *Street Fighter II* provided a final hurrah for 2D games, 3D was the new black and SNK couldn't offer the hardware or software to facilitate this need. On the home front, SNK suffered dearly for allowing substandard ports of its games to be released on the Genesis and SNES. It didn't worry about the quality of these conversions as it illustrated the power of AES over the rival consoles. Then there was Capcom, who developed a home entertainment arm that would bring the arcade games home, in many cases improving the source material. In 1996 Capcom would amaze the world with *Resident Evil*, while SNK would buy and market *Metal Slug* for the arcades and later fail to match demand for the game on AES. It would be almost ten years before *Metal Slug* would find its way to the home market proper. Such was SNK's desire to become the master of the 2D fighting game, it hadn't noticed that a genre that started in a crowded marketplace with a massive fan base had subsided, developers had left and all but the most hardcore fighting enthusiast were at home playing on their PlayStations or Saturns.

more, and that if he could unify the brand to the product he could take SNK forward to the next level. Nowhere was this more evident than when Russell would have the packaging changed on all the US consoles and games to tie in with media advertising. The success of this meant that the most successful campaign's main icon of a rabid bulldog would become the SNK seal of quality.

Finally launched in the US in 1991 for $599 with two controllers and a choice of *Baseball Stars* or *Nam '75*, the Neo Geo quickly garnered a small user base and it wasn't long before Jacobs realised that with games retailing at over $200 each, profits would be easier to find through software, not hardware. A $200 AES price drop ensued, backed by one of the most aggressive marketing campaigns the industry had ever seen, Neo Geo had arrived and fired a shot across the bows of just about everybody in the games industry.

The 'weenie' adverts (as they are now known) featured heavily across the multiformat magazines in the US. They featured a fully laden hot dog, asking gamers if they would rather play on a weenie system such as the Genesis or Turbo Grafx or the real-deal AES, a fully loaded arcade machine. This and subsequent ad campaigns held nothing back. AES was so powerful compared to its rivals that Russell didn't care where or how they were publicly compared. Furthermore, they didn't imply anything; SNK just came right out and said it. This aggression would culminate in the 'Bigger, Badder, Better' campaign; gaming press and TV based, it featured a rabid pit bull and three words: 'Bigger, Badder, Better'. This captured perfectly SNK's belief in its system, and had the effect of making people feel that their own home system was inferior – which, of course, it was.

Gamers wanted the Neo Geo desperately, but for many it was just a wild ambition. Despite price drops in the hardware, the price of games remained prohibitive. At one point in 1992, a Neo Geo game in the US would cost an average week's wage. The AES was going to be a slow burn.

In April that same year Capcom would release a game that not only secured their future for the Nineties but began a race with SNK that would dominate gaming in the same way that the Soviet and US space race dominated the Cold War, creating new technologies as a by-product. Few companies would avoid the ground swell rising around the two Osaka powerhouses as they fought over a new games genre.

Street Fighter II: The World Warrior became an instant smash the world over. Not since *Space Invaders* had a single arcade game garnered so much attention. It had bucked the trend and brought the gamers flocking back to the arcades. Fortunately for Kawasaki, after the success of *Street Smart* (1989), SNK Japan was already hard at work on a one-on-one fighting game. Some seven months after *Street Fighter II*, *Fatal Fury: The King Of The Fighters* was released. Although visually stronger than the Capcom offering, the similarities couldn't be missed. However, the addition of a second plane in the game field helped *Fatal Fury* to stand apart. This slightly more technical approach to combat met with a riotous reception from gamers, and the first of the *Street Fighter* versus *Fatal Fury* arguments was born. Gamers were divided as to which was best and, with both titles being technically accomplished, it all came down to personal preference.

Jacobs, reliably informed by his network of industry contacts, reported to Kawasaki that *Street Fighter II* was due for a SNES release in late 1992, which provided SNK with an opportunity. There was to be an 18-month delay before *Street Fighter II* would be released as a home version, while SNK already had *Fatal Fury* available on MVS; it would just need repackaging for its AES release.



» An advert for the Neo Geo arcade machine that extolled its main virtue of flexibility.

» Compare this screen to the *Fatal Fury* one above. *Fatal Fury* was aesthetically superior to *Street Fighter II*.

» The 'weenie' advert compared the powerful Neo Geo with its puny rivals.

» As early as 81, SNK was making curios software.



» This campaign would result in the dog being adopted as the SNK seal of quality.

Shipping in late 1991, *Fatal Fury* would become the AES's first killer app. Retailing at $250, it gave AES owners a game that they just couldn't play anywhere else. Nothing even similar existed on other formats, and the home version was absolutely arcade perfect. Backed by a minor advertising campaign in the vein of the weenie ads, SNK compared the full-blown AES *Fatal Fury* with the watered-down *Street Fighter II* conversion that was coming to the SNES. Unsurprisingly, sales of the Neo Geo increased in line with expectation, shifting over 50,000 units in the US during the first 12 months of *Fatal Fury*'s release.

Viewing this success as vindication for his battle with SNK Japan and, wanting to avoid a repeat of the Universal situation that had brought him to SNK, Paul Jacobs left for the ailing Data East. John Barone stepped up to take responsibility for both SNK America operations, appointing Marty Kitazawa to liaise directly with Japan, hoping to improve relations with the East and avoid some of the conflict that Jacobs had felt. Barone lacked the verve and network of Jacobs, but had a passion for SNK and business. Possibly Barone's most notable contribution was to increase the finance budgets for Kent Russell, who subsequently developed a network of game counsellors – put in place to help gamers with game strategies and to provide tips and tricks. It was one of these very counsellors who would become the public face of SNK in the US and Europe: The Game Lord. Advertorials were run across all the major multiformat magazines, describing AES games and acting as a teaser for new releases, all penned by The Game Lord. Phone lines were set up to help stranded gamers, and information from players would be gathered to aid the design of future games.

By 1992 SNK had established itself as a hardware and software provider for both the home and arcade markets. Precariously balanced, SNK was at the top of a very steep precipice. If only it could launch a flare so that the gamers would notice it en masse. For all the quality on display, *Fatal Fury* was overshadowed by *Street Fighter II* in the gaming press and sales charts. When Capcom announced a sequel for *Street Fighter II* was to launch in 1992, SNK responded with a new game altogether.

Art Of Fighting was released in 1992 and divided gamers immediately. Featuring a revolutionary scaling technique that would zoom in on characters and backdrops, it disappointed many gamers. And with only a meagre arcade performance behind it, Kawasaki turned SNK's attention elsewhere.

Unwilling to give even an inch in the fierce beat-'em-up battle with Capcom, Kawasaki instructed the SNK subsidiary Takara to develop *Fatal Fury* for the home markets. While in Japan, Kawasaki commissioned *Fatal Fury 2* – this time with a simultaneous AES release in mind, for the now lucrative fighting game market.

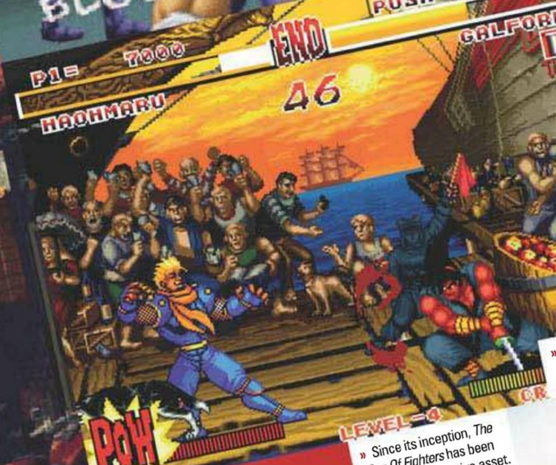
Later in 1992, SNK would find the game that would bring it the attention it so needed. It would turn out to be not only one of its biggest franchises but also one of its most

FOR ALL THE QUALITY ON DISPLAY, FATAL FURY WAS OVERSHADOWED BY STREET FIGHTER II IN THE GAMING PRESS AND SALES CHARTS



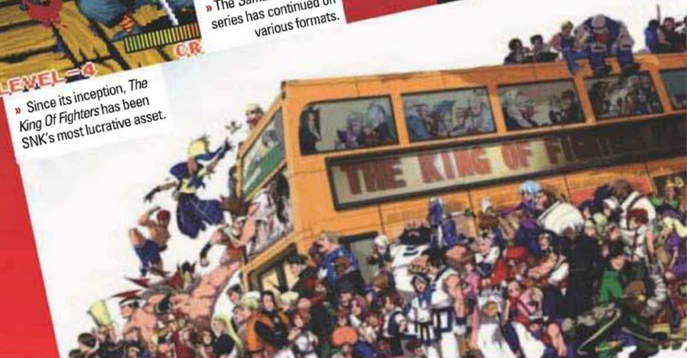


» *The Super Spy* would reveal the system's limits.

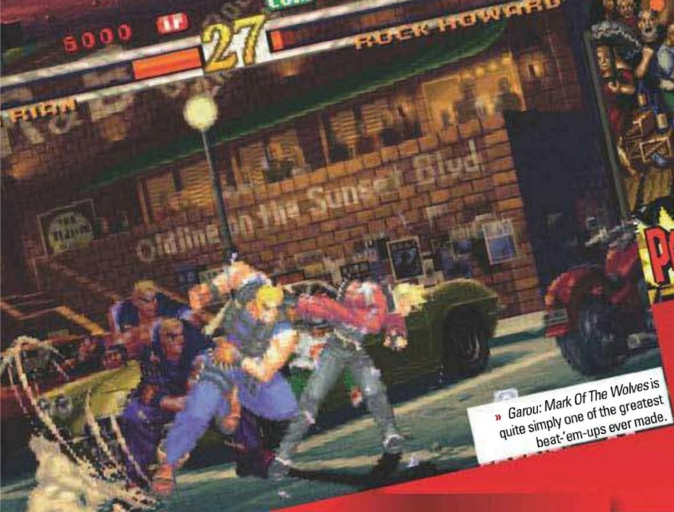


» The *Samurai Shodown* series has continued on various formats.

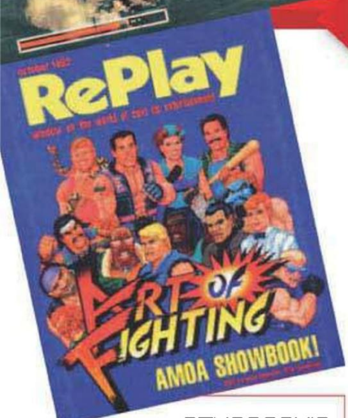




» Since its inception, *The King Of Fighters* has been SNK's most lucrative asset.



» *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* is quite simply one of the greatest beat-'em-ups ever made.



CENSORSHIP

Sometimes it could be argued that SNK, for all its marketing knowhow, erred far too much on the side of caution. In early Nineties America, *Mortal Kombat* had created quite a stir, Congress was talking about videogames and in general games were being frowned upon as a violent distraction for kids. Taking their lead from Nintendo's censorship of *Mortal Kombat*, SNK Japan censored *Samurai Shodown* for its Japanese release, without informing SNK America, leading to advertising confusion and causing SNK America no end of embarrassment. The fallout didn't end there for SNK either. So desperate were gamers to play the game in its original form that a mod chip was created to change machines' regions, and also allowed gamers to alter game configuration in the same way that a Game Genie might. Piracy became rife and, as we will see next issue, SNK suffered more than most.

controversial fighting games. Surprisingly, *Samurai Spirits* (*Shodown* in the West) didn't start life as a fighting game. "When we saw the original design documents for *Samurai Shodown* it was a horizontal scrolling action game", Kawasaki told us. "As there were many requests from our customers to develop more fighting arcade games, we changed to a more traditional fighter. The game structure was very similar to *Art Of Fighting* [such as the zoom in], but we used a totally different engine for it."

Much of the characters of the original game that Kawasaki referred to remained in place. Set in 18th Century feudal Japan, the game characters are indigenous stereotypes from their countries of origin, the music drawn from actual 18th Century scores – again, native to each country. This historical authenticity and accuracy carried right through to many of the combatants' clothes, weapons and backdrops. All this was lost on gamers, though, who were enraptured by the frantic pace and tight gameplay it contained. Blood oozed and numerous fatalities littered the experience; this was *Barbarian* for the masses. Technical and tough, *Samurai Shodown* became the embodiment of the belief that SNK crafted games that appealed to gamers. SNK, it might be said, were hardcore. It wasn't just *Samurai Shodown* that led gamers to this conclusion. *Last Resort*, released quietly that same year, was wowing fans the world over as an potential *R-Type* beater. Boasting a natural evolution of the *Vanguard* gameplay, it soon garnered a reputation as one of the most unforgiving games of all time.

By 1993 SNK had a working template and a cohesive business model. It was doing well, and this situation would have seen it grow organically throughout the Nineties, but the burgeoning board at SNK Japan wanted more. It aspired to be on a par with the likes of Sega and Nintendo, not Capcom, which led to a round of acquisitions. Alpha Denshi was brought into the SNK fold and ADK was formed, with Sammy and Taito operating as second-party developers. And with companies like Data East and Visco acting as eager third parties, game development for the MVS and AES would reach an all-time high.

From 1993 to 1994, SNK saw a period of unprecedented range and uptake for MVS and AES games. ADK would become a prolific force inside SNK, creating such classics as *Aggressors Of Dark Kombat* and *World Heroes*. There was a sequel to *Art Of Fighting* that apologised for the original. New franchises also became abundant, never more so than with the 1994 inception of *The King Of Fighters*. The manifesto for the first *KOF* was to bring together characters from all the major SNK franchises past and present to create the ultimate battle royale. Unsurprisingly, the game was a massive hit when it was released and from its launch became the only real contender to *Street Fighter*'s crown.

SNK, it would seem, had it all: a successful arcade board and system, a home entertainment division, very talented games creators and unyielding third-party support.

With so many possibilities it would seem almost unthinkable that the company from Osaka would be able to get the next few years so wrong, but nevertheless, that's exactly what happened…

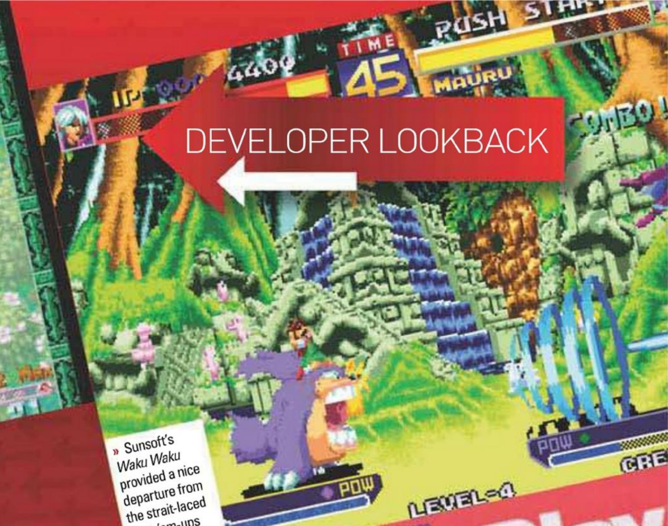
In 1993, Sega released *Virtua Fighter* and *Virtua Racing*, while Namco readied *Tekken* and *Ridge Racer* for release. The arcade boards these games used weighed in far heavier than the SNK MVS carts. The arcades were going 3D and SNK didn't have an answer. SNK Japan had its R&D department develop and eventually release *The Super Spy*, but in truth this game was sprite-based and had more in common with *Operation Wolf* than *Virtua Fighter*. Worse was to follow when



» Capcom delivered the seminal *Resident Evil* in 1996, a time of great change.



» *Last Resort* was a real contender to *R-Type*'s throne, but SNK overlooked it as it moved headlong into the fighting game genre.

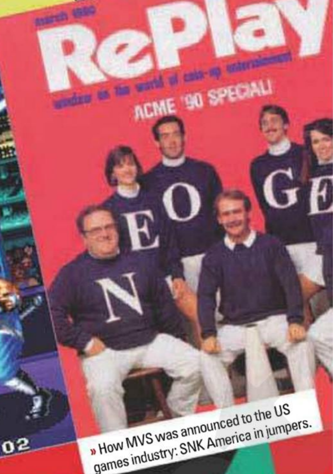


» Sunsoft's *Waku Waku* provided a nice departure from the strait-laced beat-'em-ups that were around at the time.





» Still playing strong today, *World Heroes* was a revelation in its time, yet overlooked by all but a few.



» How MVS was announced to the US games industry: SNK America in jumpers.



» Originally created by Nazca, *Metal Slug* proved to be one of SNK's strongest franchises.

Sega and NEC both announced home-based CD system, while Sega was promising its Genesis users 3D gaming worlds.

It was at this time that Barone left SNK to join the Nevada Gaming Commission. SNK took the view that Japan could run the US operation and merged the two divisions into one. Kent Russell saw the writing on the wall and, sensing that he would be surplus to requirements, left for Sega.

This move essentially left SNK in the US rudderless. Marty Kitazawa was hastily promoted to president of SNK America and continued to liaise with Japan, but for now SNK Japan was running the operation.

In an effort to increase the Neo Geo take-up rate, SNK developed a CD version of the AES. Released in Japan in 1995, it sold its initial production run of 25,000 units in a day. The arcade sticks were replaced by cheaper-to-manufacture game pads, and an all-round smarter console hit the shelves at $200 less than the AES. The games, too, now retailed at the same price point of Sega and Nintendo titles. It seemed that SNK had learnt a lot over the last two years and, despite its abhorrent loading times, Neo Geo CD was a success.

By the time SNK got the machine to the US, things weren't so rosy. Sega's Saturn had arrived and the Sony PlayStation was mere weeks away from launching. Worse for SNK America, the Japanese division had superseded the Neo Geo CD with the CDZ (the same machine but with a double-sided drive that halved load times); the gaming press reported on the new CDZ and potential customers refused to commit to a machine that they already knew to be outdated. Worse would follow when SNK announced that *Samurai Shodown RPG*, one of the company's biggest selling games in Japan, would not receive a translation for the Western market. Subjected to consumer complaints for the last two years about the way it localised games, SNK elected to eliminate the problem by not

THE ARCADES WERE GOING 3D AND SNK DIDN'T HAVE AN ANSWER

releasing titles that would require much localisation outside Japan. Potential customers acknowledged this by adopting 32-bit systems instead.

By 1996 gaming had changed significantly; SNK somehow hadn't adapted. So while gamers took a young Lara Croft home for the first time and idled their arcade time away on games like *Virtual On* and *Ridge Racer*, SNK had continued to release one-on-one fighters. By now AES games were not readily available in the shops and were ordered direct from SNK. In Japan this didn't pose a problem, but in the US and Europe this resulted in many unfilled orders. The best example of this was *Metal Slug*: made by Nazca (Kawasaki liked the game so much that he bought the company) and released to the arcades in 1996, it garnered a huge fan base. The home version was released on AES in Japan and sold well. Despite this, *Metal Slug* was a slow burner in the US and Europe and by the time gamers had warmed to it, orders couldn't be fulfilled because stocks were exhausted.

SNK was struggling, arcade revenues were down and its home systems couldn't compete with the new rivals. The future for SNK looked uncertain, but Kawasaki wasn't perturbed. He could see a way…

THE FINAL PART OF OUR SNK TRILOGY STARTS ON PAGE 244.

Thanks to the lovely Killer List of Videogames for several images.

THE CLASSIC GAME

PUNCH-OUT!!

There is nothing more heartening then seeing an unlikely hero triumph over arduous odds – a notion never so passionately demonstrated than by a brave, pint-sized boxer who went under the unfortunate moniker Little Mac







» Yeah, nice advice, Doc. Now hows about calling me a real doctor?

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO
- » **RELEASED:** 1987
- » **GENRE:** SPORT (BOXING)
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+

Rocky Balboa made a controversial return to the ring in 2006, in a fight that pitted the veteran against a younger, technically superior opponent. Chicken chasing, meat pounding and inspiring fanfare aside, the film poses the question: if you took two heavyweight fighters, from two different eras, who would prove victorious? So what would happen if you pitted the former Eighties videogame champ *Punch-Out!!* against a new breed of boxing brawlers? Cue montage.

Back in 1984, Nintendo released an innovative arcade boxing game called *Punch-Out!!*. Its cartoon tale about a transparent pugilist working his way up through a rank of oddball fighters quickly attracted droves of sleeve-scrunching loafer wearers into neon-lit arcades everywhere. It was conceivable, then, that Nintendo's grey toaster would host its own version of the game, and in 1987 a NES sequel was released.

The home version sported a number of startling differences from its cabinet prequel. The arcade's modest roster of six fighters had been increased to 11, spanning 14 bouts over three circuits and most noticeably, the transparent wireframe fighter had been replaced with a pathetic 17-year-old kid, who looked in dire need of some sunlight.

There's a distinct Stallone-esque scene in the game, which shows the eager fighter running beside his puffy-cheeked trainer, Doc Louis. The trainer is perched on a bike, trying to coax his pink-suited calcium kid into full fitness. It's a subtle sequence which personifies *Punch-Out!!*: a humorous pastiche of an underdog story, with a nod to Eighties pop culture.

The first opponent you face is the gangly orange-haired Frenchman, Glass Joe. He awkwardly bounds and squawks around the mat like a startled llama, looking uncomfortable in his surroundings and rather unsure of his undersized opponent. Beside him stands a familiar face, dressed in unfamiliar attire. Playing a cameo referee is an older, portlier looking Mario. He is donning a bow tie and winkle-pickers, and beneath his nose sits his trademark moustache, and on his brow winks that very famous red flat-cap.

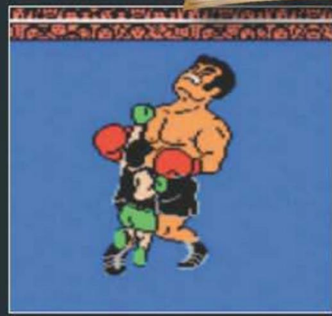
Mario calls the fight and you begin. The first thing that you will notice is the lack of freedom and attacks at Mac's disposal. Five punches: two low body blows, two uppercuts, and one special spinning

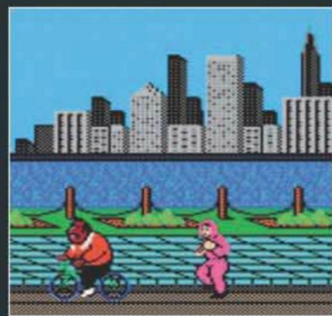


» Glass Joe looks weary on his feet after a devastating blow from the little man.



» Another easy win for the thunderous Little Mac. Does he load cement into those gloves?


» A cutting left jab by Mac sends Tom Jones' mouth guard into his tonsils.


» Mac's mum accidentally put a red sock in the washing machine again.

haymaker. But with only a sparse number of buttons with which to call commands, what do you expect? Thankfully, the small arsenal of moves you do have work a charm and it's these damage-dealing deficiencies that help make the fights immediately engulfing. Crucially, the punches feel solid and proficient in rattling loose teeth – a vital sensation for any boxing game that's worth its weight in blood, sweat and tears. Certain aspects of the sport are lacking in the game; you can't bounce around the ring, taunt an opponent, or trap a fighter against the ropes. The boxing presented here is stripped of its gloves, and fought with basic bare knuckles.

All of the opponents that Little Mac must face look suspiciously out of his weight class, so he must muster brains as well as brawn, and tempt each fighter to expose their weak spot to take control of the fight. Each opponent follows a strict routine of jabs which eventually open up their defence, and with it your chance of victory. Ironically, progressing far in *Punch-Out!!* doesn't rest on how many punches you throw, but rather the timing with which you throw them. Anticipating your opponent's punch pattern and pre-empting a nasty head pounding is what gets you a shot at the heavyweight title, a notion emphasised during the intermittent round breaks. Rather then copper pennies or cotton wool buds being pressed against Mac's cuts and swells, Doc's modest remedy is a subtle pat on the back, coupled with stern advice on how best to topple the stronger opponent. Your part in this role was to increase the tempo of Doc's patting by tapping select, unravel his cryptic riddles, and utilise them in the ring.

ANTICIPATING YOUR OPPONENT'S PUNCH PATTERN AND PRE-EMPTING A NASTY HEAD POUNDING IS WHAT GETS YOU A SHOT AT THE HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE

The fights are split into three rounds lasting three minutes each and many of the matches will be won by technical knockout. One thing you should keep a keen eye on during each round is the state of Mac's stamina – displayed by the heart meter – which will diminish from absorbing heavy blows and throwing messy, missed swings.

Punch-Out!! always had personality standing proudly in its corner. Every combatant seemed strikingly iconic, and cleverly their idiosyncrasies seemed to play both to their strengths and their weaknesses. Case in point, one of the later opponents, King Hippo, is grossly oversized, and a heavy blow from his flabby fist will send Mac's health plummeting rapidly. However, find his weighty weak spot – a plaster-covered belly button – and one knockdown is all it takes to end the fight, as the majestic gastropod proves too heavy to get back up onto his feet.

There is no question whatsoever that boxing games have evolved dramatically since the release of Nintendo's punchy 8-bit brawler. Gone are the button-bashing jabs, the hazardous haymakers and the thumb-splitting action of trying to frantically raise a floored fighter to his feet. A new breed of fighter exhibits a foreign formula and battles with a deadly stance broken with analogue commands, offering a greater level of control. In true *Rocky* style, this bloody clash has gone to the score cards: there is just no separating these two gallant fighters. Both demonstrate the finest virtues of the sport. There goes the final bell, ending a fight that was just too close to call.


» It looks as though Russia's Von Kaiser catches a nasty low blow to his Kalashnikov!

MIKE TYSON'S BLOW OUT

Nintendo actually released two versions of *Punch-Out!!* on the NES, distinguishable by their final bosses. The game was initially released in 1987 as *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* and had Little Mac face the lobe-loving rebel in a dream match-up for his heavyweight title. However, in 1990 another version of the brawler was released, omitting Tyson from the game and replacing him with the soppy sounding, Mr Dream. Although the new champion looked poles apart from Iron Mike, he inherited all of his trademark moves. The theories surrounding the reasons for the switch included the boxer's media-masticated image and his high-profile run-in with the law. The genuine reason was less exciting however, involving a contract dispute and loss of title. The game franchise has since had one other incarnation, *Super Punch-Out!!* on the Super Nintendo, which, oddly, dropped the character of Little Mac and saw a return of the transparent perspective adopted by the arcade game.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SNES, GBA, VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 1991

SUPER MARIO BROS
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1985

DONKEY KONG
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1983





BANJO-KAZOOIE

Rhyming witches, annoying sidekicks, short-sighted moles – Banjo-Kazooie had it all. Join us as we uncover the secrets behind one of the greatest N64 platformers ever made.





"PROJECT DREAM STARTED LIFE AS AN ADVENTURE GAME ON THE NINTENDO SNES" GREGG MAYLES

Spend any amount of time talking to Rare's Gregg Mayles (now creative director) and Chris Sutherland and it becomes obvious that they genuinely love the games they get to create. It's a fact that becomes continually apparent when we were lucky enough to talk to them about the conception of *Banjo-Kazooie*, easily one of Rare's best N64 titles. Of course when you consider that this is the same Rare that was also responsible for such N64 hits as *GoldenEye*, *Blast Corps*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo*'s enduring success becomes even more impressive. And to think that when development on *Project Dream* (as it was originally known) first began, the affable Banjo wasn't even in it!

"It was definitely a convoluted route", laughs Mayles as he begins the story of one of videogaming's favourite bears.



» Grotbags eat your heart out. Gruntilda, chief nemesis of Banjo, stealer of bears and part-time nose picker.

"Contrary to what many people would like to think, we didn't just have a flash of inspiration one day and say, 'Right, we are going to make a humorous 3D platform adventure game featuring a bear in tight yellow shorts carrying a mouthy bird in a blue backpack'. The main character in *Project Dream* was initially a boy called Edison, but we felt he was too generic. So then we tried a rabbit character (that oddly ran on two legs) and then a bear. People liked the bear, the bear became Banjo, *Project Dream* became *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Banjo-Kazooie* was born."

ENTER BANJO

As Mayles mentioned, before the lovable Banjo came along, Rare's focus was on a young boy named Edison. But what was the story behind *Project Dream* and how exactly did the main character change from a traditional homo-sapien to an ursine? "Well, *Project Dream* originally started life as an adventure game on the Nintendo SNES", reveals Mayles. "Edison was a boyish adventurer who inadvertently got tangled up with a bunch of no-good (but inept) pirates, led by Captain Blackeye. It was the game that the original *Donkey Kong Country* team started on after they had finished *Donkey Kong Country 2*, and it took the ACM graphics technology to the next level. The introduction of the Nintendo 64 made ACM obsolete, so we switched development over to the new machine after only a few months. *Dream* continued for around another year, before we realised that the scope of the game and the early choices we had made regarding technology meant it was going to take many years to complete. By this time, the main character of *Dream* had become a bear who wore a backpack purely to keep his adventuring items in. We liked the bear and wanted to make a more action-based game that centred purely on him and his abilities."

Banjo may well have gone through quite a few changes before reaching its final state, but the move from 16-bit SNES to Nintendo's 64-bit console didn't prove to be that much of a headache, as Chris Sutherland (*Banjo*'s lead programmer) explains: "Luckily, we were able to carry over a lot of the supporting code from *Dream*, which meant that we were able to complete *Banjo-Kazooie* in less than

IN THE KNOW



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** RARE
- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM ADVENTURE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+





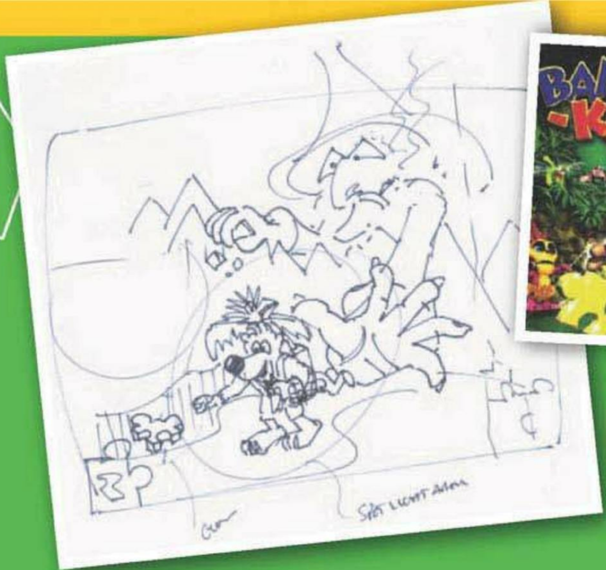
» *Banjo-Kazooie*'s hub was huge and gave you an early impression of its sheer size.

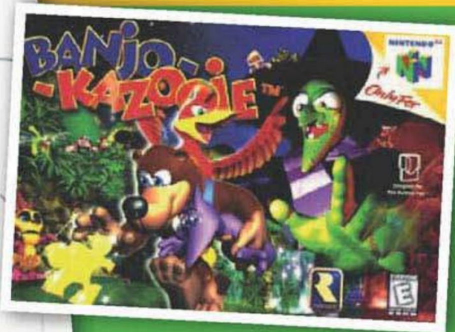


» Once all the missing pieces had been found a new level would open up to you.

BANJO-KAZOOIE









» An early concept sketch of the original artwork and how it ended up once it hit retail shelves.

GETTING JIGGY WITH IT

One thing that set *Banjo* apart from many other platformers was the sheer amount of different items you had to collect. Unlike other games of its ilk, though, the objects in *Banjo* actually had a purpose. "Every self-respecting platform game hero has to have something to collect, but we wanted something that rather than being just a shiny object, was a shiny object that could actually be used for something", begins Mayles. "The desire to have a direct connection between this shiny object and opening up the worlds led to completing pictures of the worlds like a jigsaw, which in turn led to the missing pieces being the Jiggies. Jinjos came from a years-old idea (dating back to *Donkey Kong Country*) of having a 'hard-to-collect collectable' – one that would run away or camouflage itself instead of dumbly sitting around waiting to be collected. Funny how things turn out, as the Jinjos never ran away and even whistled to attract your attention! Actually, they were probably the dumbest collectable ever. The Feather, Eggs, Notes and Honey on the other hand, were simply themed around Banjo, Kazooie and the game's musical theme."

15 months", he reveals. "Interestingly, there were two months prior to that where we experimented with using the *Dream* visual technology to create the game, then we altered our approach to better accommodate the design."

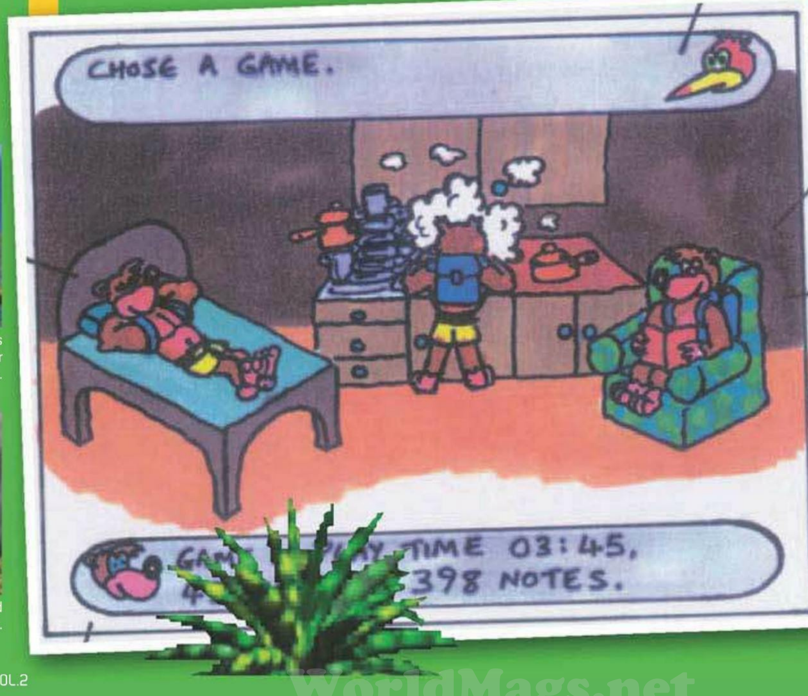
With so many alterations made to *Banjo-Kazooie* over its 17-month gestation period, it's perhaps surprising to realise that it was put together by a relatively small group of coders: "We initially started with about ten people, then grew to 15 by the end", confirms Mayles, who was *Banjo*'s lead designer at the time. "We had seven engineers, five artists, two designers and one musician. The leads in all four disciplines are still going strong at Rare, having worked on *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*, *Viva Piñata* and now Banjo's new adventure, which will be appearing on the Xbox 360."

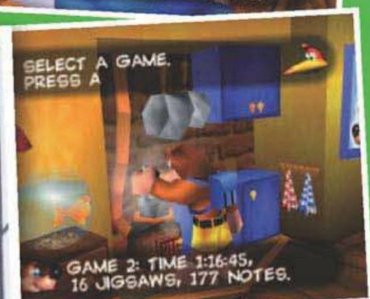
Once *Project Dream* was officially no more and work began on *Banjo* in earnest, gamers worldwide were eager to see how Rare's latest platformer would turn out. After all, with the *Donkey Kong Country* trilogy proving to be so popular on the SNES, it was perhaps expected that Rare's first platformer for the N64 was going to be just as good. After creating such a successful series of hits on its 16-bit console, we were interested to know if there was there any pressure from Nintendo to ensure that the same magic happened on the N64.

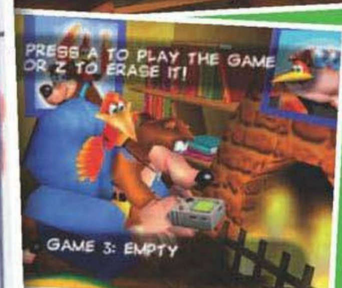
"Oh not at all", begins Mayles. "Nintendo never put any pressure on us to achieve success. I think that if you aim specifically for success it is much harder to achieve. Creating a game to the best of our ability that we hope will be successful is a far better approach. Nintendo, like Rare, only wanted to release the best games possible, so I guess you could say we put

> "NINTENDO HAD A DIFFICULT TIME UNDERSTANDING THE SELF-DEPRECATING HUMOUR AND NEVER-ENDING TORRENT OF SARCASM THAT KAZOOIE CONSTANTLY DISHED OUT"
> GREGG MAYLES





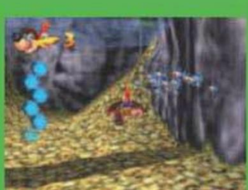




» As you can see from this original sketch, these final N64 loading screens are extremely similar to the art that originally inspired them.



» Once you found the red launch pad it was possible to take to the air. All the better for exploring *Banjo*'s beautiful worlds.



» Swimming sees the music softening and lots and lots of bubbles.





» An early sketch of the warping Dingpot, and how it eventually looked in the finished game.

ourselves under pressure to deliver a great game. Of course, not all great games are successful, but we were fortunate that *Banjo* was considered both a good game and a very successful one."

Indeed, *Banjo-Kazooie* proved to be an incredible success, and while it was unable to match the 8 million sales that Rare's *GoldenEye* had achieved, it ended up receiving impressive scores from virtually every magazine and website that reviewed it. In fact, in the eyes of many gamers, here was a platformer that finally managed to improve on the majesty that was Miyamoto's *Super Mario 64*. We were keen to know if Rare had ever planned on making a '*Mario 64* beater' from the very beginning.

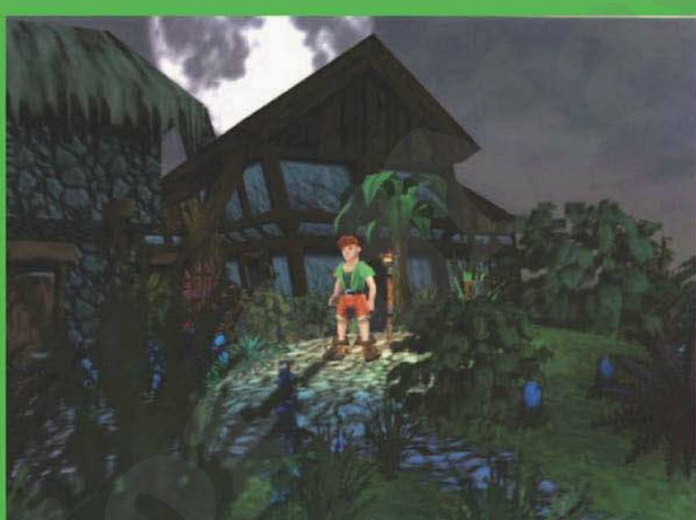
"Not really", states Sutherland. "Setting out with the intention of making an 'improved version' of another game would be quite uninspiring to work on, so that's not something we've ever done", he explains. "Instead you have to create your own path and follow that – certainly you can take inspiration from other games and *Mario 64* was just one of those games." But what did Nintendo think about *Banjo-Kazooie*? And did it ever have a say in the direction it would end up taking? After all, we could imagine that Miyamoto was watching the project with quite a lot of interest.

"There was very little, actually", confirms Mayles. "Seeing that *Banjo* was actually Rare's creation, we didn't have to show Nintendo what we were doing until we were happy the game was what we wanted it to be. I think that some people at Nintendo had a difficult time understanding the self-deprecating humour and never-ending torrent of sarcasm that Kazooie constantly dished out, although this didn't prevent the game from becoming popular in Japan. Every 3D platform game owes a respective nod to Nintendo and Miyamoto-san, and for anyone to even compare *Banjo* to the piece of gaming history that was *Mario 64* is a great honour indeed."

Rare may have not set out to create a '*Mario 64* beater' but it's obvious that the two games do share some common traits. Impressive cameras, a variety of memorable characters and plenty of inventive levels to explore are just a few of the similarities to be found in the two classic titles. One area where *Banjo* did have the edge, though, was in its special moves. While Mario was no slouch in the wall-jumping and somersaulting departments, he couldn't hope to compete with the dazzling array of specials that Banjo and Kazooie had access to. As well as traditional bottom slams and double-jumps, the dynamic duo was also able to shoot eggs at opponents, use Kazooie's beak to peck at enemies and even flip through 180 degrees so Kazooie could use her long legs to climb surfaces that were too inclined for Banjo to access. Although the pair worked beautifully together, like Banjo, Kazooie's involvement in the game came at a much later stage.

ENTER KAZOOIE

"Initially Kazooie didn't even exist; it was just Banjo on his own", reveals Mayles. "During the planning of Banjo's abilities, we thought it would be a good idea if he had a traditional 'double-jump', so that he could get himself out of mid-air trouble and



» A very early shot of how *Project Dream* initially looked on the N64.



» Lose all your lives and you'd witness this amusing cut-scene.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SABRE WULF
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD, BBC, COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1994

DIDDY KONG RACING DS
SYSTEMS: NINTENDO DS
YEAR: 2007



THE MAKING OF... BANJO-KAZOOIE







also cover greater distances. The problem was that just activating a second jump in mid-air looked rather odd. We came up with the (looking back, extremely wacky) idea that a pair of wings could appear from his backpack to help him perform the second jump. We also wanted Banjo to be able to run very fast when required, so as the idea with the 'double-jump' wings had worked so well, we added a pair of 'fast running' legs that appeared from the bottom of the backpack. So we had wings and legs, and soon after we came up with the logical conclusion (well, it was to us) that these could belong to another character, one that actually lived in Banjo's backpack. This character became Kazooie and we transferred most of Banjo's moves to her, adding her sarcastic wit as a contrast to Banjo's good natured charm for good measure."

As well as sharing a number of special skills, it was also possible for the pair to transform into a number of different animals that ranged from a crocodile to a termite in order to retrieve otherwise unreachable items.

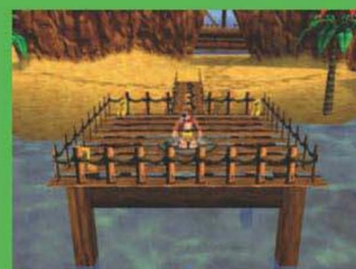


Transformations weren't straightforward, though, and it was impossible to change into a new form unless you had collected the required number of Mumbo tokens that were carefully hidden throughout the massive game worlds. Once you had enough, Mumbo Jumbo would use his voodoo magic and you could continue to explore *Banjo*'s nine huge levels from a brand new perspective. "The actual transformations were dictated by the level design", explains Sutherland. "Once all the level themes had been decided upon (which was done before work on the first one commenced) we looked through them and picked the ones where we thought the transformations would be most suited. After this, it was just a matter of coming up with a suitably interesting transformation for the theme of the level and what abilities the transformation could have. The idea for the transformations came about from wanting Banjo to be made small on Mumbo's Mountain (the first level), so that it gave the level a different sense of scale. But rather than just shrinking the main character, which had been done before, we hit upon the idea that he could be changed into an alternative, equally small form – the Termite."

MEET THE CAST

Despite the main focus of Banjo being on its two heroes and their array of special moves and transformation skills, there were plenty of supporting player characters, many of which are just as memorable as the bird and bear double act. Bottles the mole was on hand to explain the many new moves that Banjo and Kazooie would gain access to, while Mumbo Jumbo was a witch doctor who could transform Banjo into a variety of different beasts, thus helping the loveable bear to complete specific tasks in his new guises. Perhaps the most memorable character of all, though, was Gruntilda the witch: a vain, evil hag with a penchant for speaking in rhyme and capturing Banjo's sister Tooty at the beginning of the game, an act that spurs Banjo into undertaking his epic adventure. With all the characters having such distinct personalities, we asked Mayles if they had been based on anyone in real life – the Stamper brothers perhaps? "Banjo and Kazooie no, but Bottles could be likened to the typical clever kid in every school that wore really thick glasses – hence the Bottles family all having slang terms for such spectacles as their names", confirms Mayles. "Gruntilda, on the other hand, was inspired by Grotbags, the bumbling incompetent witch from *Emu's Pink Windmill Show*." Darn, so the rumours of Chris Stamper carrying his brother round the Rare offices on his back are untrue, then…

Perhaps one of the reasons why gamers shared such an affinity with Banjo and Kazooie was because of the charming

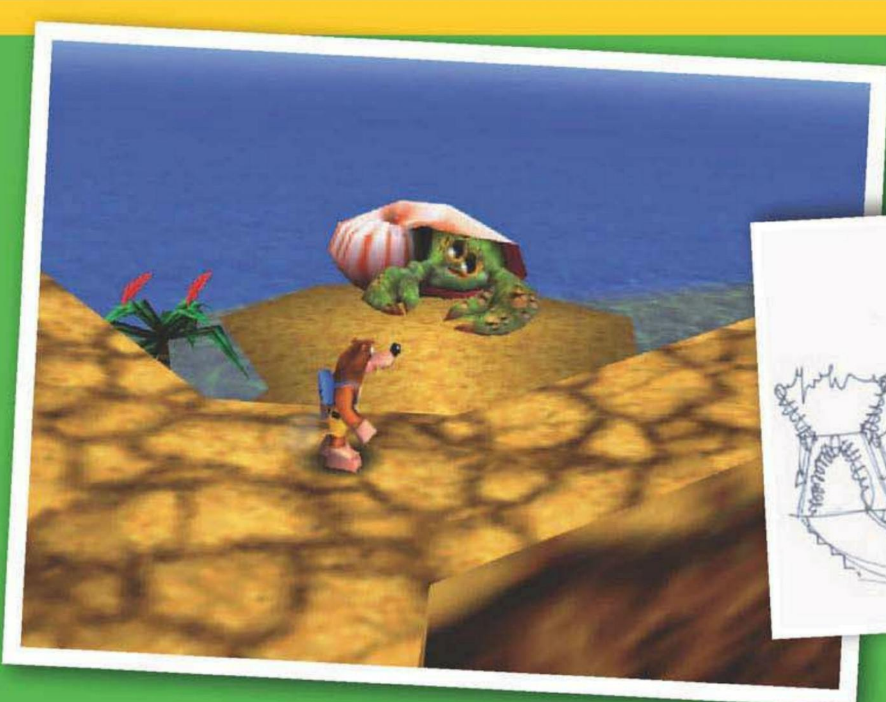


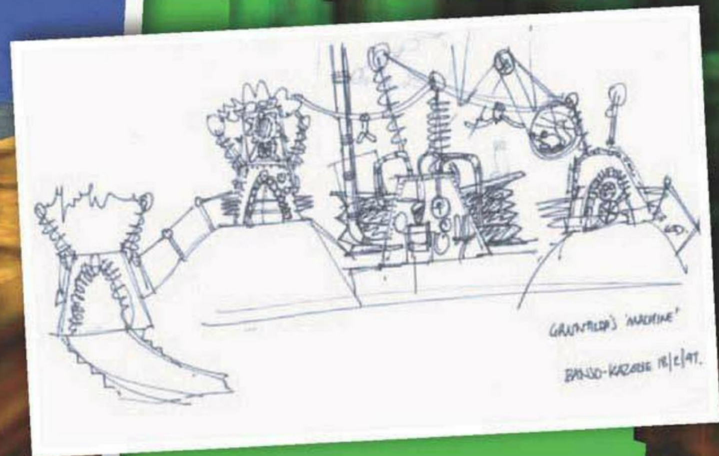
» The beginning of Treasure Trove Cove. Return here to go back to the main game hub.



» Banjo's double-jump proved to be extremely useful for timing jumps properly.

"ELEMENTS OF FUNGUS FOREST EVENTUALLY FOUND THEIR WAY INTO DONKEY KONG 64, WHILE MOUNT FIRE EYES WAS INCORPORATED INTO BANJO-TOOIE AS HAILFIRE PEAKS" CHRIS SUTHERLAND





» **Left:** He looks menacing, but this giant hermit crab is easy to defeat and hides a golden secret. **Right:** An early sketch of Gruntilda's transformation machine.

way that they communicated with each other and the other residents of *Banjo*'s world. Like the *Zelda* games, there's no real speech in the game; just some rather cute mumbling that perfectly suits the cartoony nature of the game. "One of the things you have to remember is back then speech for games was still in its relative infancy, and less-than-convincing speech heard in some games made us feel that it didn't really add to the experience", explains Mayles when questioned about the characters' distinct voices. "We didn't want to ruin player's perceptions of the characters by getting their voices wrong, but we did want the characters to be heard – so we hit upon a compromise. The mumbling allowed us to convey the personality of the characters without them actually speaking, and of course was very easy to implement. It also added a certain endearing charm that a lot of players have commented on and it was something that made the game unique."

It wasn't just the voice characterisation that made *Banjo-Kazooie* stand apart from its peers. It also just happened to open with one of the most hilarious musical introductions the videogaming world has even seen, and even today it never fails to raise a smile. Knocking on the screen to get your attention, Banjo immediately launches into an amazing hoedown that sees him joined by sister Tooty, the annoying Kazooie and Mumbo Jumbo, who constantly outplays Banjo, much to the bear's frustration. It's a delightful sequence that fully sums up Rare's legendary status on the N64 at the time, but where did the idea originate? "Well, only Banjo had a name to begin with, and someone remarked that if he was called Banjo he should play one", begins Mayles, "in order for his bird companion to fit in musically – and so they could play a duet for some as yet unforeseen reason, which eventually became the hoedown – we gave her a Kazoo and named her after it. A Kazoo was chosen, as it can be a really annoying instrument, much like the personality of the bird. Unfortunately, we had trademark problems with 'Kazoo', so we changed it to 'Kazooie'. Tooty and Mumbo were given instruments for no reason other than it allowed them to join in with the hoedown and be introduced to the player before they even started the game. We actually tried a similar tongue in cheek approach with the '*DK Rap*' at the start of *Donkey Kong 64*, which coincidentally featured *Banjo*'s lead engineer as one half of the rapping duo during a break from coding and supplying voices for Banjo and Kazooie, but this was received with less affection as people thought we were trying to be serious. I think Grant (*Banjo* and *DK64*'s



» **Above:** The original false ending that never appeared in the final game.

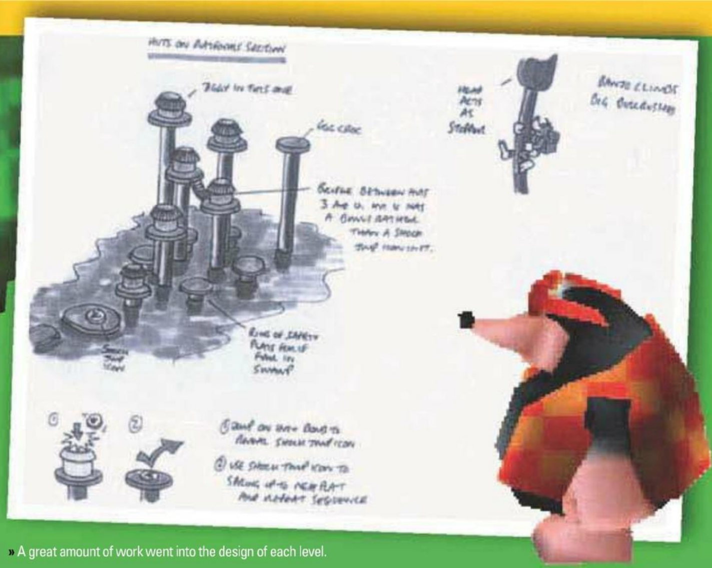
HOEDOWN SHOWDOWN

It's one of the funniest openings in any videogame, so we thought we'd show you *Banjo*'s classic hoedown in all its glory. Ooh, we really spoil you sometimes.



THE MAKING OF... BANJO-KAZOOIE

musician) is still bitter about this to the current day – in fact I'm sure he'll have something to say about it, yet again, when he reads this."



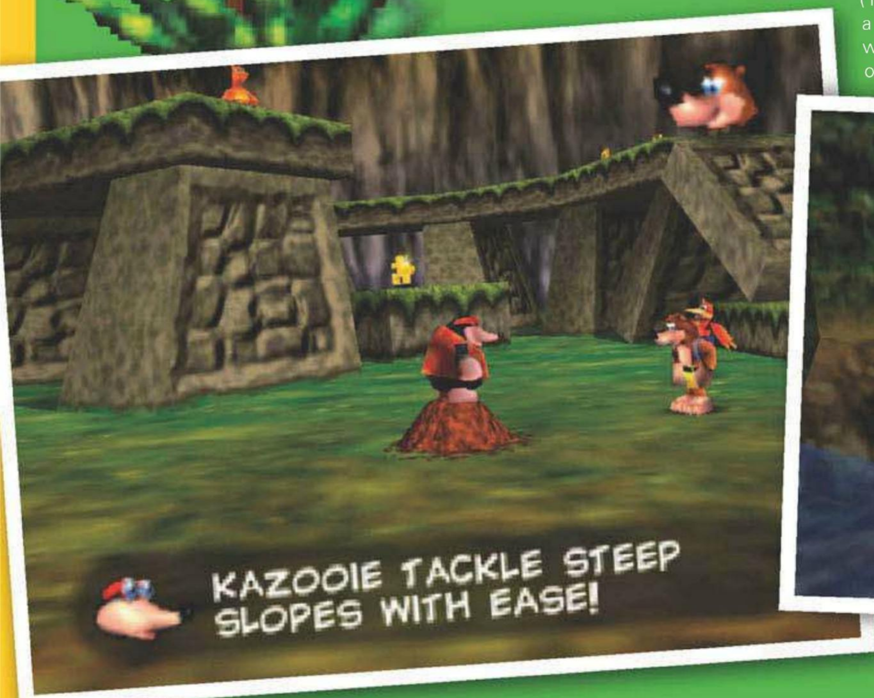
» A great amount of work went into the design of each level.

BRAVE NEW WORLDS

As can be expected from a game that starts off with a 'duelling banjos-styled' hoedown between a competitive bear and witch doctor, *Banjo-Kazooie* happened to have an extremely memorable soundtrack. Filled with musical flair and beautiful touches (check out how the volume becomes all muffled when you swim under water), its cheerful tunes perfectly captured the atmosphere of each level you explored. From the jaunty jingle of Treasure Trove Cove to the sombre tones that accompanied the exploration of Grunty's Lair, *Banjo*'s many tunes worked perfectly. Throw in an assortment of incredibly cute spot effects and here was a game that sounded as good as it played. Despite the music being some of the best we've heard on an N64 platformer (that's right, we prefer it to *Mario 64*'s) it was *Banjo*'s excellent graphics that really managed to impress, and even today it remains a visually alluring title. While a recent play revealed it to be nowhere near as populated as we once remembered, the stunning level design and creation is still achingly obvious and it makes the somewhat simplistic-looking (though no well less designed) world of *Super Mario 64* appear rather dull in comparison. "From an art perspective, the characters were created with minimal amounts of texturing; this gave them a very clean look", explains Sutherland. "The backgrounds, on the other hand, had a very large number of textures, and in many cases we used very big textures cut into several 64x64 pieces (the largest texture size the N64 could draw). This meant we were able to avoid having tiling textures everywhere. Also we used a decal technique that allowed us to blend areas of textures into one another. Overall having a very detailed background mixed with clean simple characters created a great visual contrast."

While the end result was undeniably superb, the complex visual look provided Sutherland with more than a few headaches: "From a software perspective, we pushed the memory of the system very hard", he continues. "As you move the camera around the map in *Banjo-Kazooie*, the machine is constantly throwing out of memory things you can't see and pulling in the scenery that appears into view. This gave us major memory fragmentation issues ('Fragmentation', to try to give a non-technical analogy, is like when you want to place a big box on your desk, but can't because there's too much paperwork scattered around it. To fix this, you first need to move all the little bits of clutter together to create a big enough space, then you can place the box down.) We used a proprietary system that 'reshuffled' memory continuously as you played to eliminate the fragmentation. I'd doubt many N64 games of the time did anything like that – overall it meant we could dedicate a higher number of polygons to the characters and backgrounds than many other games at the time managed."

It may have pushed the machine to its limits, but the results were there for everyone to see. Each of *Banjo*'s nine levels may have been based on the sort of environments that had appeared in countless other platform titles, but clever level design and familiar themes made the outlandish looking locations instantly recognisable. "We wanted players to be able to travel to places that were larger than life, but still relatively believable in a fantastical way. Once a theme for a world had been chosen, we brainstormed as many ideas as possible that you would expect to see in such a location, then used these ideas to shape the world, before adding a twist of humour as the finishing touch. Taking Treasure Trove Cove as an example, we wanted everything possible





» **Left:** Bottles was a short-sighted mole who would teach you new special moves.
Right: These green pads would allow Banjo and Kazooie to leap even higher than usual.







» **Left:** An early sketch of a Jinjo, and above, how they ended up.

that you would imagine a desert island to have – crabs, pirates, a wrecked ship, a sandcastle, a lighthouse and treasure, where X marks the spot, of course."

THE MISSING WORLDS

While nine huge worlds to explore seemed more than generous, Rare had actually intended to include several more. Unfortunately, time constraints meant that levels like Hammerhead Beach and Fungus Forest were cut out. They didn't disappear forever, though: "It's easy to think up more ideas than are necessary or possible", continues Sutherland when we asked him about the infamous missing levels. "Fungus Forest and Mount Fire Eyes were additional levels that weren't needed, whereas I think Hammerhead Beach was something to do with the fabled Stop 'n' Swop. Elements of Fungus Forest eventually found their way into *Donkey Kong 64*, while Mount Fire Eyes was incorporated into *Banjo-Tooie* as Hailfire Peaks. There were also other ideas for levels that were transferred to the sequel – Glitter Gulch Mine (mine) and Witchyworld (fairground)." So if you had to drop several levels was there anything else that failed to make the final cut? "Definitely", continues Sutherland. "We had actually planned a surprise ending and additional game mode: after the mighty Jinjonator had pummelled Grunty into submission atop her tower, the witch's final spell projectile intended to hit Banjo and turn him into a frog. The player would then have gained control of the rescued Tooty, who then had to search through the levels to find enough 'Mumbo Tokens' to transform Banjo back into his normal ursine self. This mode was dropped due to time constraints, Grunty's spell was changed so it missed and the idea for the Mumbo Tokens was eventually used in *Banjo-Tooie*."

Even though several elements never made the final cut, *Banjo-Kazooie* proved so popular that a sequel, *Banjo-Tooie*, was released two years later, and while it once again received exceptional reviews, Mayles is the first to admit that it wasn't perfect: "Even though we thought that *Banjo-Tooie*'s more complex and interlocking worlds were better than those of the original, many fans still believe that *Banjo-Kazooie* was the better game due its simpler structure", he explains. "I would say we got the balance right the first time and perhaps made the all too common mistake of wanting bigger, better and more for the sequel."

Some gamers may not have preferred Banjo's second adventure, but that doesn't mean that the franchise is forgotten and Rare is now once again hard at work on a new Banjo title for the Xbox 360. The amusing video that was released at X06 suggests that Rare has lost none of its humour, but were they prepared to tell us any more about Banjo's new adventure? "Can't tell you much, I'm afraid", continues Mayles, "but our aim is to take the 3D platform game into the next generation and do something more than just adding polygons. Some fans want more of the same, but the *Banjo* of yesteryear has no real place in tomorrow's market on the Xbox 360. What we want to do is retain all the elements that made the first two games so loved, but also try things that breathe new life into a genre that has sadly been neglected for many years. I think old and new fans alike will love it, although, let's face it, I would say that)." While Mayles is obviously reluctant to reveal more about Rare's latest project, his love for the series is evident for all to see and it's fitting perhaps that he gets the last word on why he feels the game remains so loved. "We built *Banjo-Kazooie* on a combination of dysfunctional characters, variety of gameplay, humour and impressive locations – I can only assume that some of these are what gamers remember. I certainly hope so, as we have plenty more of all of these to come!"



» All that's been released so far of the new *Banjo* game is a brief trailer that made its debut at X06. Showing the pair's attempts to get past a locked door, it perfectly captures the quirky humour of the original game.



STOP 'N' SWOP TILL YOU DROP

One of the most infamous stories surrounding *Banjo-Kazooie* is its fabled Stop 'n' Swop, which would, allegedly, have allowed data to be transferred between *Banjo-Kazooie* and its sequel, *Banjo-Tooie*. Over the last nine years, Stop 'n' Swop has been the subject of much speculation on a number of forums and, sadly, it would appear that Rare is in no hurry to reveal the actual truth behind it. Not just yet, anyway… "We couldn't believe the amount of attention this feature attracted", admits Mayles. "Even now there is a dedicated bunch of fans – hello, Rare Witch Project – determined to hack the truth out of the game. We've seen all sorts of speculation over the years and it has kept us highly entertained. In fact, I actually posted on their forums once, offering to reveal all, but I was dismissed as a crank. Secretly I don't think they want to know, as trying to find out the answer is far more fun than knowing it. So I'm going to say nothing yet again, although we are considering revealing the truth somewhere in the third game, as some kind of anniversary treat." Chris Sutherland was no more forthcoming: "For reasons I can't explain, I doubt if all the details could ever be revealed on this, but in the meantime I guess you'll have to wait for the Xbox 360 game to see…" Aaarrggh!!

"WE WANTED PLAYERS TO BE ABLE TO TRAVEL TO PLACES THAT WERE LARGER THAN LIFE, BUT STILL RELATIVELY BELIEVABLE IN A FANTASTICAL WAY"
GREGG MAYLES



» An early sketch of Mumbo Jumbo, the coolest saxophone player ever.

Special thanks to Gregg Mayles, Chris Sutherland, Simon Farmer, and finally, Wil Overton, who made all this possible.



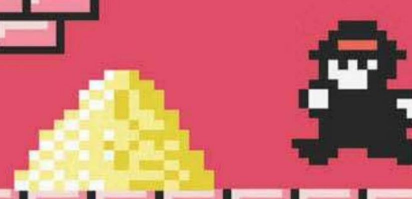
THE DEFINITIVE LODE RUNNER

STUART CAMPBELL DRIVES PAST THE STOP-'N'-SHOP WITH THE RADIO ON, BEFORE REALISING HE'S GOT A BIT CONFUSED AND IS ACTUALLY SUPPOSED TO BE WRITING THE COMPLETE HISTORY OF LODE RUNNER. HE'S BEEN WORKING TOO HARD AGAIN, THE IDIOT.

When two or three old videogamers are gathered together, sooner or later the conversation will turn to the eternal questions. "Is Sue, the fourth ghost in *Ms Pac-Man*, actually just Clyde from the original *Pac-Man* in drag?", one will ask. "Is it you or the aliens who are the *Galaxians*?", another will ponder. And sooner or later, they'll probably get round to, "So, which game has appeared on the most formats ever?" And one of them – almost certainly the cleverest and best-looking one – will probably reply, "You know, I wouldn't be at all surprised if it was *Lode Runner*".

Because there can be very few games that have appeared on anywhere near as many platforms as Doug E Smith's seminal gold-collection platformer. The like of the aforementioned titles, well-kept as they are reclusive, are retiring wallflowers in comparison. Where's the Sega SG-1000 version of *Pac-Man*, eh? Or the PC Engine port, or the Atari ST release? Nowhere is where. But all those formats, and almost any other you can think of, has seen an official *Lode Runner* game. (For the sake of sanity, let's not even think about the hundreds of homebrew tributes, add-ons, rip-offs and pseudo-sequels.) And still they come, more than 20 years after the original, with versions on consoles as recent as the DS and Xbox 360.

But why has this primitive-looking game endured when so many have fallen by the wayside? Why, despite being originally created by an American, are most *Lode Runner* games released only in Japan? Why are so many of the series' games so mind-bogglingly hard? These are just a few of the questions we won't be answering in this feature. The Definitive… is only here to bring you the facts, man – psychological speculation and racio-ethnic character-trait analysis aren't covered by our insurance. But if you want to find a way through the tangled maze that is the history of *Lode Runner* and separate the gaming gold from the spray-painted doggy doo, then this article's your man. Let's go, Mr Driver! (That's *Chase HQ* – Ed)



1982
MINER (APPLE 2)

So let's start with a game that isn't called *Lode Runner*. ('Oh no' – readers everywhere.) The *LR* story truly begins with programmer Doug E Smith wasting the resources of his university mainframe computer in the early Eighties to create a game called *Kong*, an ASCII-graphics platformer confusingly inspired by the classic coin-op *Space Panic*. It proved so popular with the students that Smith went on to write an updated version for the Apple II home micro, and called it *Miner*. Never actually commercially published and with tiny green blobs in place of the series' trademark gold bars, it's nevertheless instantly recognisable as *Lode Runner*, and all of the game's core components are in place.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The Apple emulator Applewin.



» *Miner*'s enemies, in a little nod to *Space Panic*, are clearly crude versions of that game's antenna-bearing red aliens.

1983
LODE RUNNER (APPLE 2/C64/NES/SPECTRUM/MSX/PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING ELSE)

The first commercial *Lode Runner* was published by Broderbund a few months after the appearance of *Miner* and was an immediate success. With a breathtaking for the time 150 levels of platforms and ladders, it represented a towering challenge to players weaned on the more manageable scale of games like the 10-screen *Miner 2049er*. Indeed, with limited lives, no continues and no saves, it was almost completely unconquerable to the vast majority of its audience, so when the Spectrum port came out in 1984, it gave users access to the editing system that, in addition to letting you create and save your own completely original levels, also let you move the existing ones around at will, so you could at least see them all. The feature was so popular that most subsequent *Lode Runners* have also included level editors. (Indeed, many of the original 150 levels were designed by Smith's friends and neighbours using the first version of the editor – only about 30 of the stages were created by the author himself.)

While most of the home computer versions were straight ports from the Apple game, French company Loriciels also created an excellent, very distinctive version for the Amstrad CPC (later ported to the Atari ST), with a credits screen in which everyone working on the game had the first name 'Doug'. The NES version, meanwhile, coded by Hudson Soft, introduced a zoomed-in scrolling view and changed the stick man cast into characters from its *Bomberman* series, the first in what would turn out to be a long line of thematic shifts.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The ST and NES versions are probably the best, and run in the Steem and VirtuaNES emulators respectively.

1983
LODE RUNNER II (MSX)

Oddly, after the first game being released on so many formats, the MSX was the only one to get this standalone sequel. It's really just the original with an all-new set of levels*, but it was sold as a separate cart. It's sluggish and not particularly interesting, and unless you're an obsessive *LR* completist it's probably not worth going to a lot of trouble for.

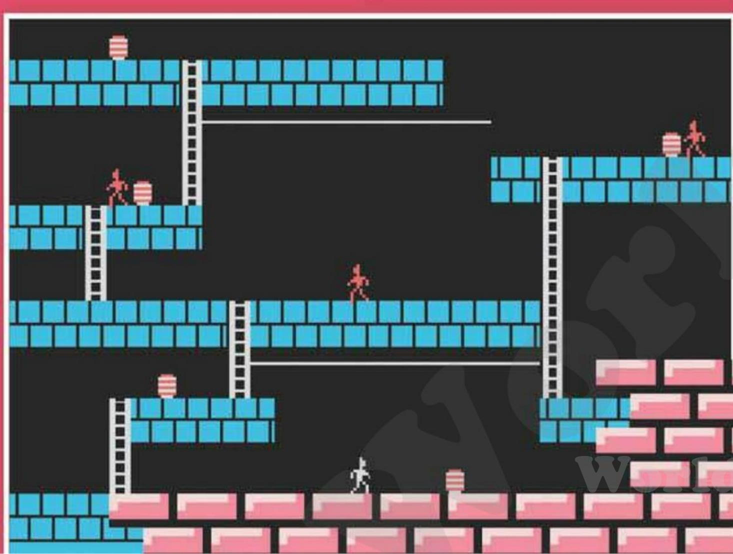
* As far as I can tell, anyway. And this goes for all the other games in this piece, too. There are literally thousands of different levels in the dozens of *Lode Runner* games, and if you think I'm sitting here taking pictures of them all and cross-referencing them on some sort of giant chart so that I can see if some of the stages from *Hyper Lode Runner* on the Game Boy are in fact taken from the Japanese Famicom disk version of *Super Lode Runner 2* or some other obscure version, you must imagine that I actually get paid in solid gold bars for these features.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The BlueMSX emulator.



» Interestingly, if you collect the gold bars in a certain order, this level's gravity is suddenly reversed. (Lie.)

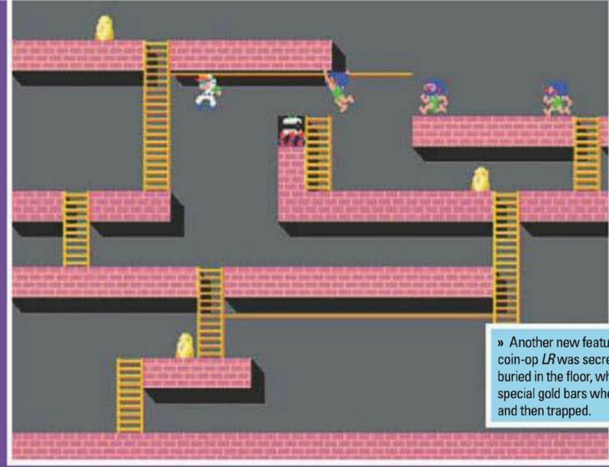
» The SG-1000 version subtly changed the design of many levels to fit them into the machine's display. See if you can spot the differences in Level 1 compared to other shots of it in this feature.



1984

LODE RUNNER (ARCADE). LODE RUNNER: THE BUNGELING STRIKES BACK (ARCADE)

While home conversions of arcade games were a mainstay of the videogaming industry for much of its first decade, home titles making the transition to coin-op was a much rarer phenomenon. *Lode Runner* was almost certainly the first, and *R-Type* publisher Irem did a beautiful job of it, giving it bright cartoon graphics, music and a bunch of new features, like points bonuses for completing screens without digging any holes or killing any enemies. It's hard to imagine arcadegoers standing at the cabinet for the hours and hours it would have taken to knock off all the coin-op's 99 levels, but it evidently did well enough to generate a data-set sequel the same year, and this slick and speedy port is the definitive version of original *Lode Runner*.



» Another new feature of the coin-op *LR* was secret enemies buried in the floor, who give up special gold bars when revealed and then trapped.

1984

CHAMPIONSHIP LODE RUNNER (NES/SEGA SG1000/MSX/APPLE 2/C64)

Despite the gruelling difficulty, there were some devoted gamers who'd managed to battle their way through all 150 levels of the first game and wanted more. Their punishment for such an Oliver Twist-like outburst was *Championship Lode Runner*, a crushingly difficult set of new levels that started where the brutal final stages of the original left off, belying the friendly "Hello" spelt out by the ladders on the first stage (except on the NES version, which has different levels).

PLAY IT NOW ON: The NES version of *CLR* was released (along with the original) on the GBA in the guise of *Hudson Best: Lode Runner Collection*. Probably the easiest version to track down.



» This screen is really, really tedious, except on the SG-1000 where most of "HELLO" is solid brick rather than gold bars.

1985

PROFESSIONAL LODE RUNNER (C64)

Slightly oddly, *Championship Lode Runner* didn't appear on the Commodore 64. Instead, hardcore *LR* fans got *Professional Lode Runner*, a different sequel in very much the same vein, stuffed with absurdly hard and often tiresome levels requiring minutes of repetitive and dull trekking around. (Often characterised by long horizontal lines of gold bars in mid-air, which have to be collected by dropping onto them one at a time then going all the way round the level again to drop onto the next one.)

PLAY IT NOW ON: C64 emulators like VICE and CCS64.

» Here you see a classic example of horizontal lines of gold bars (the "wheels" of the locomotive), necessitating a dozen boring "laps" of burrowing through the bricks above.

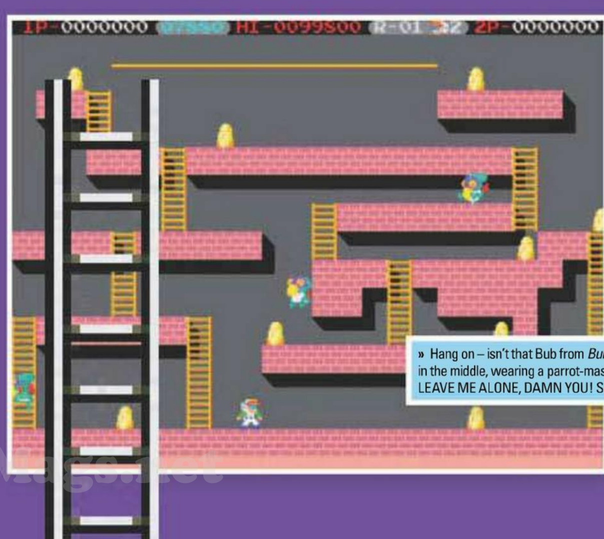


1985

LODE RUNNER – GOLDEN LABYRINTH (ARCADE)

Evidently, Japanese gamers were gobbling up *Lode Runner* levels at a terrifying rate of knots, so a third data-set coin-op was released in the space of barely a year. There's nothing much of interest to be said about it, so we'll move right along.

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME

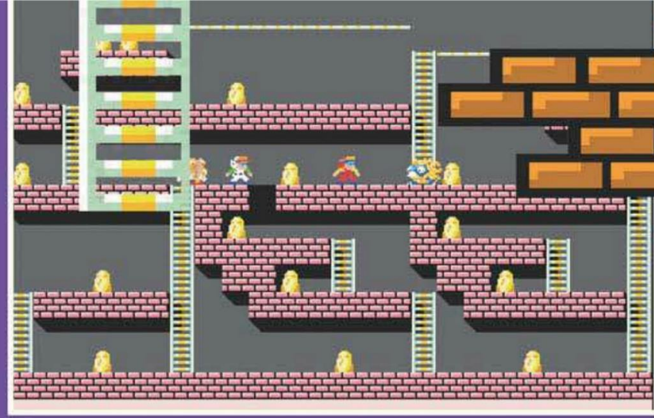


» Hang on – isn't that Bub from *Bubble Bobble* in the middle, wearing a parrot-mask disguise? LEAVE ME ALONE, DAMN YOU! Sob.

1985
LODE RUNNER'S RESCUE (C64, ATARI 800)

This, on the other hand, is just plain weird. Despite the name, it bears no resemblance whatsoever to *Lode Runner,* (it doesn't even feature any digging) and is in fact a barely-disguised rip-off of Atari's hit 1983 arcade game *Crystal Castles,* with a storyline that appears to be about retrieving *Lode Runner*'s lost dog. W, as they say on the internet, TF?

PLAY IT NOW ON: VICE, CCS64 or Atari800Win.



» You're pretty much buggered already here.



» In fairness, *LRR* does have one original feature not stolen from *Crystal Castles,* namely the fact that you can swim in water. It's still rubbish, though.

1986
LODE RUNNER - TEIKOKU KARANO DASSHATSU (ARCADE)

For the fourth *Lode Runner* coin-op, Irem tweaked the graphics and reduced the number of stages (just 30 this time), but also introduced one big innovation in the form of the 15-level 'Pair Game', where two players compete on a new set of screens. Both play the same level simultaneously, but if either of them gets caught by a monster, they both die (actually they just share one set of lives, but the effect is the same) and have to start the level again. A fun – and very tough – challenge is to finish two-player levels on your own, not only collecting the gold but also protecting the stationary and vulnerable second player.

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME

1987
SUPER LODE RUNNER 1 + 2 (FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM)

It's round about now that *Lode Runner* historians really start to get a headache. The two NES *Super Lode Runner* games run only on the Famicom Disk System peripheral for the console, which was never released outside Japan. Published by Irem rather than Hudson Soft, they're nevertheless largely just new level data-sets, though they pinch a couple of features from Irem's arcade releases (like special gold bars and extra baddies buried in the floor until you unwittingly dig them out). In fact, *SLR1* is basically a port of *Teikoku Karano Dasshatsu* with some extra/changed levels. *SLR2* is another data-set release, and changes the enemies again, this time to ogreish monsters slightly resembling the level 1 boss from *Ghosts 'N Goblins.* The two-player levels have individual author credits, suggesting that they were user-created, continuing the tradition set by the first ever *Lode Runner.*

PLAY IT NOW ON: The FDS-supporting NES emulator VirtuaNES.

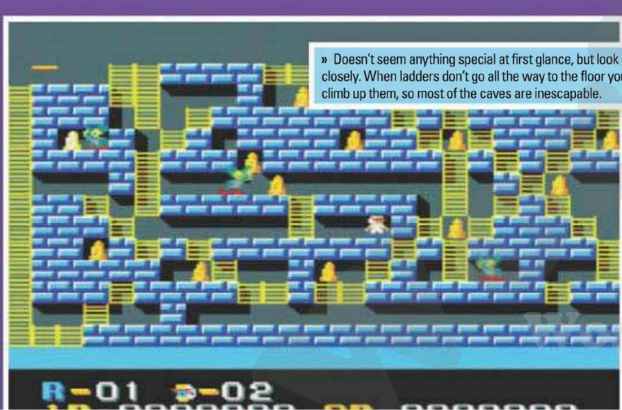


» This horrible level would go on to reappear in *Hyper Lode Runner* on the Game Boy.

1987
SUPER LODE RUNNER (MSX)

Irem also ported the first *Super Lode Runner* to the MSX, but it's not quite that simple. The NES version's first level didn't make it across for some reason, though after that the two games seem to have the same stages. The MSX version also doesn't scroll, though it manages to have fancier graphics than the previous MSX titles. However, in addition to the normal levels and the two-player mode, the MSX version also includes the 'Challenge Game'. This is an all-new set of stages (with passwords for each one) which are so mind-bogglingly, insanely difficult that your reporter can't even figure out how the first one could be theoretically possible, never mind actually do it. If you can beat it, write in and we'll make you king.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The very fine BlueMSX emulator.



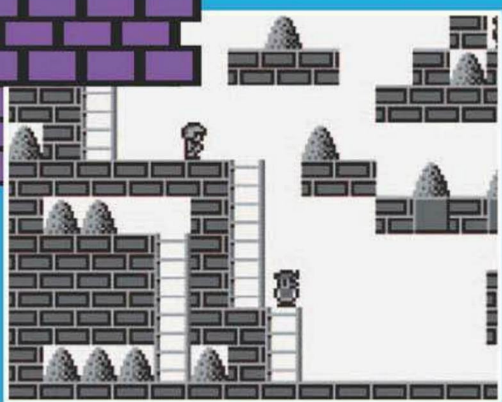
» Doesn't seem anything special at first glance, but look closely. When ladders don't go all the way to the floor you can't climb up them, so most of the caves are inescapable.

1989
HYPER LODE RUNNER (GAME BOY)

One of the strangest episodes in *Lode Runner*'s history came when it provided one of the Japanese launch games for Nintendo's Game Boy. It's not the zany storyline in which you storm the Labyrinth of Doom, braving General Zod's mutant cyborg zombies (how unlucky, to already be a cyborg zombie, and then get mutated as well), it's not the slightly-tweaked gameplay (in which some levels have a key that opens a door to a timed sub-level), and it's not even the mind-mangling difficulty.

No, the really mental thing about *Hyper Lode Runner* is that it includes the traditional editor function – with which you can create up to four new levels, each with the timed sub-levels if desired – but doesn't include any battery-backed memory on the cart to save them to. Yep, the instant you switch off the Game Boy, your levels are lost forever. No save, no password, no nothing. All gone.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Game Boy emulators like Visual Boy Advance, whereby the magic of save states you can preserve your custom levels for posterity.



» This nasty little puzzle is the very first thing you see on the very first level of *Hyper LR*.

1990
LODE RUNNER – LOST LABYRINTH (PC ENGINE)

Despite the new name, this is actually just a bog-standard conversion of *Lode Runner 1*, with the graphics changed again so that the player is a heroic anime-type adventurer and the monsters are big Fifties-style robots, but everything else is just as it always was. The screen scrolls – not as much as the NES version – and there's no music or two-player mode, but it's nice and fast and there's a password save facility after every screen. Semi-interestingly, legend abounds of a PC Engine *Lode Runner II*, but the only evidence of its existence is one very low-resolution picture of the title screen, and if anybody knows anything more concrete about it, they're keeping it very quiet.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The PCE emulator Magic Engine.



» "Ooh, a hot spring! I wonder if there's time for a quick dip?"

1993
BATTLE LODE RUNNER (PC ENGINE)

This unassuming little release is not only one of the jewels in the *Lode Runner* crown, but also of the PC Engine itself. It's something close to a perfect distillation of what the game's about, with the slickest and smoothest control of any *LR* game and well-designed levels that are hard without being cheap, repetitive or fiddly. What's more, in addition to the normal ('Puzzle') game and Edit mode, you also get the Battle mode implied by the title, where up to five players can compete in three different multiplayer games on a new set of levels. Only one of them offers the option of CPU opposition, but they're all frantic and gloriously entertaining as everyone charges around the single-screen stages, trying to grab the power-ups that are vital to trap the other players in pits. Both modes are blessed with lovely cutesy *Bomberman* graphics (we're back with Hudson Soft again) and excellent Japanese-style music, and the whole package is just about flawless.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Magic Engine.

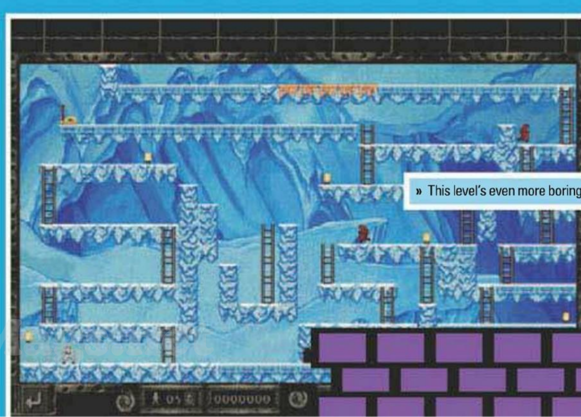


» It's all very well saying "WELCOME" when you've just sent a load of bloodthirsty dinosaurs after me, *Battle Lode Runner*. Tch.

1994
LODE RUNNER – THE LEGEND RETURNS (PC/SATURN)

Lode Runner had largely been a Japan-only and console-only concern for almost ten years when someone finally decided to give it another outing in the West, so novice *LR* publishers Sierra had a brand new version created, in keeping with the remaking style of the time – which is to say, it was a bit of a mess. (The notion of updating classic old games was still pretty novel at this time, and nobody had quite figured out how to do it properly yet.) Tiny graphics and an opening clutch of vast levels with almost nothing going on in them bored most of the audience away before things got interesting, with more inventive features like levels played in near-darkness except for the area illuminated by your torch.

PLAY IT NOW ON: You can just about get this to run on a modern PC with some faffing around, but the 1995 semi-sequel *Lode Runner Online* is a better bet, so check out the entry for that instead.



» This level's even more boring than it looks.



» The busy, pseudo-3D graphics get in the way a bit – it's actually easier to play from the handily large radar screen.

1994
LODE RUNNER TWIN (SNES)

Picking up the *Battle Lode Runner* ball and running with it, *Lode Runner Twin* is actually four games in one. It's basically a cartoonified version of *Lode Runner 1* featuring, for the first time in the series' history, a plotline. You get two one-player games (the levels-in-sequence story mode, and a 'challenge' game with 50 different levels and various selectable graphics styles) and two split-screen two-player modes (either play a single level of your own choosing, or a randomly-selected set of ten). Nothing dramatically special, but it's decent enough fun.

PLAY IT NOW ON: The SNES emu ZSNES.

1995
LODE RUNNER ONLINE: MAD MONKS' REVENGE (PC/MAC)

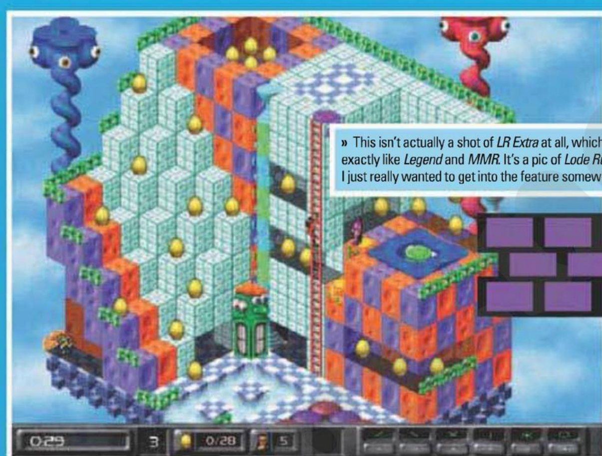
The name here is a bit misleading, because *MMR* is basically just a tweaked version of *The Legend Returns* with a few extra levels and power-ups and the like, along with the ability to play a normal two-player game across an internet connection. It scarcely justifies a new release and title, but on the upside it was coded for 32-bit Windows rather than old 16-bit versions (as *TLR* was), so you should get it to run much more easily on a modern PC than its predecessor.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your PC. The game's author, Todd Daggert, has actually made the full version freely downloadable on his website. (Google "Todd Daggert" to get straight to the download.)

1997
LODE RUNNER EXTRA (PLAYSTATION)

This is actually just called '*Lode Runner*' on the box, and is in fact a belated PlayStation release of *The Legend Returns*, but with a little something extra. The standard *TLR* game is the default, but selecting *Lode Runner Extra* from the menu gives you a whole new set to play with instead, which as far as I can tell is exclusive to the PlayStation game.

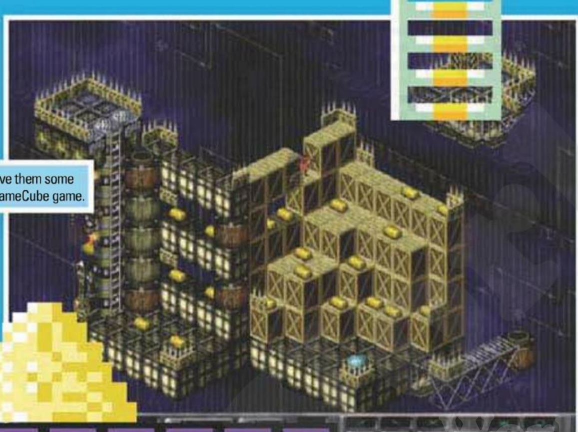
PLAY IT NOW ON: Original copies are pretty hard to find, but it runs well in the PSone emulator ePSXe.



» This isn't actually a shot of *LR Extra* at all, which looks exactly like *Legend* and *MMR*. It's a pic of *Lode Runner 2* that I just really wanted to get into the feature somewhere.



» This doesn't look like any kind of a monastery to me.



» At least it gave them some ideas for the GameCube game.

1998
LODE RUNNER 2 (PC)

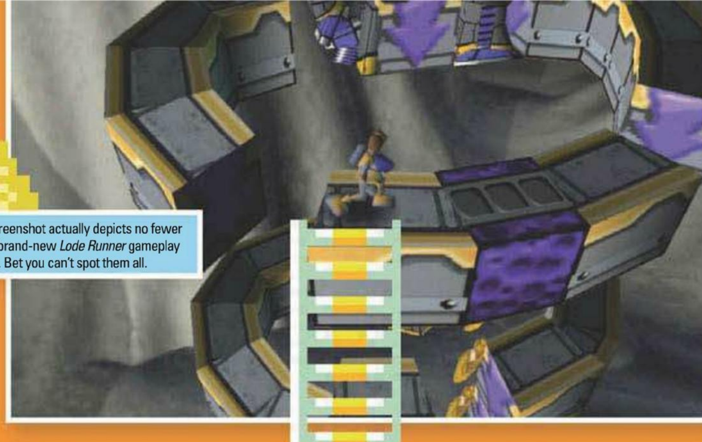
The Nineties remakes, mediocre as they were, rejuvenated the *Lode Runner* name and 1998 saw the series' big leap into 3D. Developer Presage created a beautiful game, full of varied Escher-esque enviroments in an isometric perspective that was easy to navigate, thanks in part to a flexible and friendly control interface and game structure, and with a thoughtful addition of power-ups. Then, with the hard work done, they handed the job of level design to a monkey. It's as if nobody told the level designer that *Lode Runner 2* was in 3D. Just look at the screenshot. See that little bloke in red just above centre? That's you. ('Jake Peril', excellently.) You've just dug through one crate from the top level, and now you only need to jump down and right to the next floor and start collecting those gold bars, right? Wrong. You're stuck, and any second that crate's going to fill back in and you're going to die. Every level of *Lode Runner 2* is full of invisible walls like this, where routes that your character would clearly be able to take are blocked off for no reason at all. *Lode Runner 2* is one of the most cack-handed games this writer's seen in almost 30 years of videogaming.

PLAY IT NOW ON: *Lode Runner 2* works fine on modern PCs, so you can take a look for yourself.

1999
LODE RUNNER 3D (N64)

The fate that befell the next *Lode Runner* game was scarcely any less depressing, albeit in a different way. Perhaps learning some lessons from *LR2*, the Infogrames-developed *Lode Runner 3D* is one of gaming's lost treasures. Moving the gameplay into 3D without the arbitrary inconsistency of its immediate predecessor, *LR3D* sticks closely to the original template while using the extra axis to add a maze-like facet to the platforming antics. It's pure 'adventure playground' gaming, working from the same core principles as *Super Mario 64*, and recommendations don't come much higher than that. So why is it depressing? Because *Lode Runner 3D* is an absolutely fantastic game (it deserves a feature to itself to properly explain why it's so great – for now you'll just have to take my word on it), but if five readers go out to buy a copy after reading this article, they'll have just doubled its worldwide sales. Very few games this good have ever sold so poorly and received so little critical acclaim (the usual consolation prize for brilliant games nobody buys), and that's a videogaming tragedy.

PLAY IT NOW ON: It runs perfectly in the splendid Project 64 emulator, but it really needs the original N64 controller to get the best out of it. You should be able to find the original cart for no more than a fiver, so do the right thing.



» This screenshot actually depicts no fewer than five brand-new *Lode Runner* gameplay elements. Bet you can't spot them all.



» This picture probably tells you everything you need to know about *Power Lode Runner*.

1999
POWER LODE RUNNER (SNES)

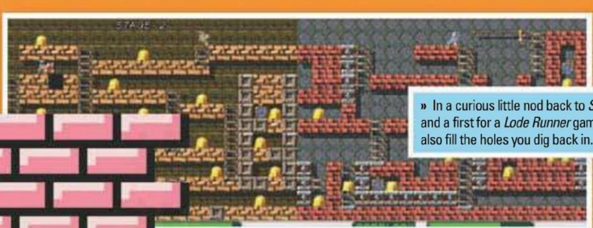
And then, inexplicably, there's this. Released the same year as the wonderful N64 game and a year after the beautiful 3D incarnation on the PC, *Power Lode Runner* is a hideous mess of a game that set the series back about ten years. Twee 2D graphics depicting woodland creatures who appear to be collecting logs and stones in bubbles rather than shiny gold bars, a viewpoint so crazily zoomed-in it'll take you 10 minutes to recognise the levels as being basically the ones from the original game again, and a wading-through-quicksand pace that'll make you wish for death by halfway through the first stage are just three of the contributing factors marking out *PLR* as the worst *Lode Runner* game ever. Thankfully, it's also stuffed with countless nested levels of impenetrable Japanese menus, so you'll probably be driven off long before you have to experience any of the other gameplay horrors that we don't have room to list here.

PLAY IT NOW ON: ZSNES, assuming you've committed some awful crime you wish to serve a penance for.

2000
LODE RUNNER – THE DIG FIGHT (ARCADE)

The fifth arcade *Lode Runner* – published by Psikyo, better known for its scrolling shoot-'em-ups – marked a significant change in the game concept, designed to maximise profit. While time limits had featured in previous coin-op versions of the game, here the time limit is the central factor. Rather than lives, you have a clock that's replenished by collecting icons and completing screens and reduced by collisions with monsters, and while the game has several different modes (indeed, there are two substantially differently-structured versions of the coin-op), all of them involve clearing only a small handful of screens before your game is over. The other core feature is the clever twin-screen best-of-five two-player mode, in which you race not to collect gold bars but to smash eggs, each of which releases a monster which can only damage the opposing player (though it can get in your way without killing you).

PLAY IT NOW ON: MAME, although sadly there's no way of getting around the tiny screen area caused by the twin monitors.

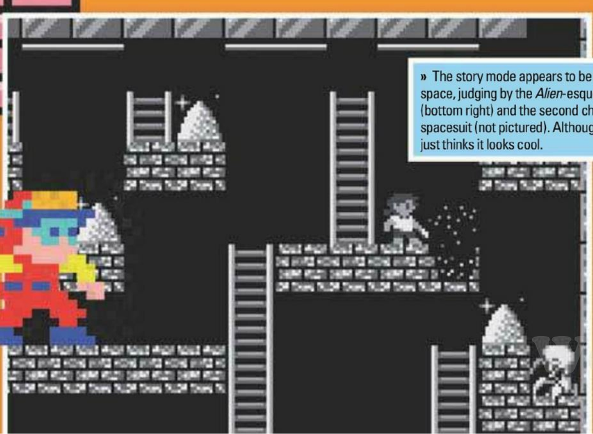


» In a curious little nod back to *Space Panic* and a first for a *Lode Runner* game, you can also fill the holes you dig back in.

2000
LODE RUNNER (WONDERSWAN)

The turn of the millennium was a big time for *Lode Runner*, and 2000's second release in the series showed up on the black-and-white incarnation of Bandai's ill-timed Wonderswan handheld. The Banpresto-coded title is a curious little game, with all-new levels, bonus items to collect and new features like blocks that collapse when you stand on them. Each level starts with you choosing between two characters – a little kid who runs fast, and a slower spaceman whose advantages aren't immediately apparent (though the all-Japanese story/menu options may offer a clue). It's intriguing, slick and well worth a look if you can dig up a copy somewhere.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Runs very nicely on the Wonderswan emulator WSCamp if you switch the buttons around in the config menu so they're on the right sides.



» The story mode appears to be set in space, judging by the *Alien*-esque monsters (bottom right) and the second character's spacesuit (not pictured). Although maybe he just thinks it looks cool.

2000

LODE RUNNER DOMUDOMU DAN NO YABOU (GAMEBOY COLOR)

There was still time in 2000 for yet another developer to try its luck at making a *Lode Runner* game, and this time Xing had a go. It came up with two modes, one a zoomed-in 50-level version of the original game and the other a story mode which is completely incomprehensible without a fairly good command of Japanese. Garish colours and gluey movement make even original mode not much fun to play, and there's nothing much here to make it worth the effort.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance.



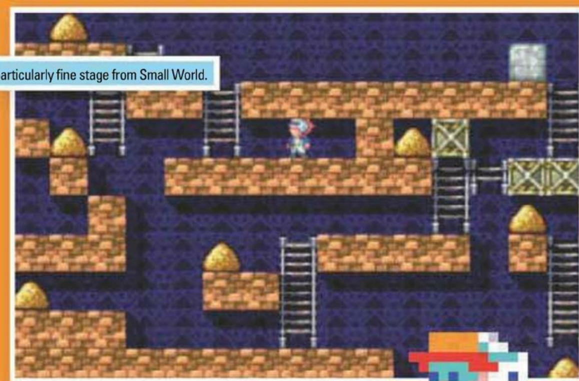
» The game's a bit rubbish, but the little bank-manager enemies are sweet.

2002

LODE RUNNER (GBA)

Sure enough, 2002 saw still another new set of hands at the *Lode Runner* wheel, with Success given the controls. The result was a game pitched somewhere between the coin-ops and Hudson's NES games, with cute graphics and a traditionally forbidding difficulty level, but this time one founded much more in head-scratching puzzle-solving than taxingly precise platform-running – many levels have no baddies at all, and there are no time limits, so it's just you against some bricks. You can also choose from two level sets – Small World, with very compact stages, and Middle World, which zooms out the graphics to provide more screen area without scrolling. Never released in the West but 99 per cent in English, this is an excellent introduction to the principles of *Lode Runner* for beginners.

PLAY IT NOW ON: Visual Boy Advance



» This is a particularly fine stage from Small World.



» This is the whole of Level 7, for example.

2003

LODE RUNNER (MOBILE)

This all-new 60-level Java release from Hudson Soft packs a lot into its tiny space. The opening stages are minuscule and can often be completed in under ten seconds, but later ones offer large, scrolling levels in a variety of graphical styles, which can be switched off in favour of a classic look if you find them confusing on the teeny screen of a phone. The ability to play any level at any time makes it an ideal mobile game.

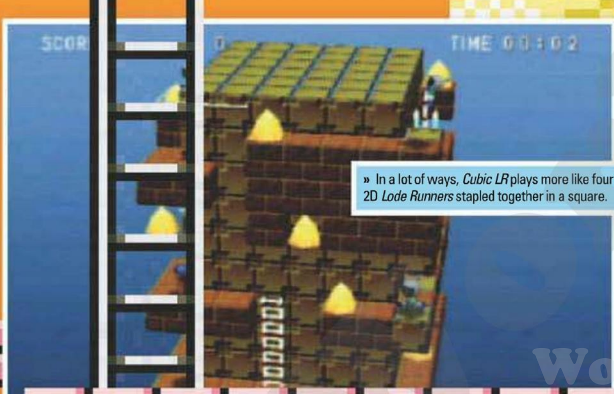
PLAY IT NOW ON: As well as working on a wide variety of phones, you can play this on your PC via the splendidly named 'N-Gage Cool!' emulator.

2003

CUBIC LODE RUNNER (GAMECUBE/PS2)

At this point, since we've already considerably over-written the commissioned length of the feature, we'll skip over the Japanese GBA compilation of NES ports, the cute keyring game and the DS version, and move straight on to the last completely original *Lode Runner* game to have been released to date. Part of a budget series of remakes (which also included *Star Soldier* and *Adventure Island*), *CLR* was in essence *Lode Runner 2* done properly, though sadly without the stunning Escher graphics. It's solid but fiddly in play, with the need to constantly adjust the camera and mentally transpose controls 45-degrees (to account for the isometric perspective) detracting a little from some fiendishly cunning levels. And that's it. If you can think of any *Lode Runner* games we've missed, please don't hesitate to throw yourself off a tall building. See you next time!

PLAY IT NOW ON: Your GameCube or PS2. You should be able to pick up an import copy for around a tenner.



» In a lot of ways, *Cubic LR* plays more like four ordinary 2D *Lode Runners* stapled together in a square.

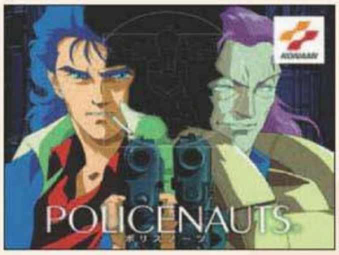
遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

FULL OF EASTERN

ON THE VERGE OF MANKIND'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT, ONE MAN LOSES EVERYTHING

POLICENAUTS

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** HIDEO KOJIMA
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** PC98, SATURN
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £40, DEPENDING ON VERSION
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE FOR:** 3DO, PSONE
- » **CAN'T IMPORT?** SNATCHER (MEGA CD)

Although the mechanics are simpler than *Policenauts* (menu selections as opposed to mouse point-and-clicking), and the stories aren't directly connected, both *Policenauts* and *Snatcher* are by Hideo Kojima and both have the same gritty cyberpunk noir styling, not to mention complicated and engrossing narratives. Plus, you'll understand *Snatcher*, since it's in English. Although rare and expensive, it was release in the UK for the Sega Mega CD, and is as close as you'll get to *Policenauts* without actually playing it.





Interesting fact
There are numerous references to other Kojima games, like a cameo appearance by Napoleon from *Snatcher*. To find him, keep an eye out for a short man sitting down at an airport terminal – he'll mistake you for Gillian Seed.

Everyone knows of Hideo Kojima, the creator of both Snatcher and the Metal Gear franchise. But how many know about Policenauts? And for those that do, which have played it, as opposed to only hearing snippets of lost conversation? As one of the most fantastic Japan-exclusive games ever released, Poychi Robo is happy to dye his hair blue, light a cigarette, and commence the Policenauts investigation.



» The lightgun sections are fast and action-packed, with one later occurring in a speeding vehicle. (Saturn)

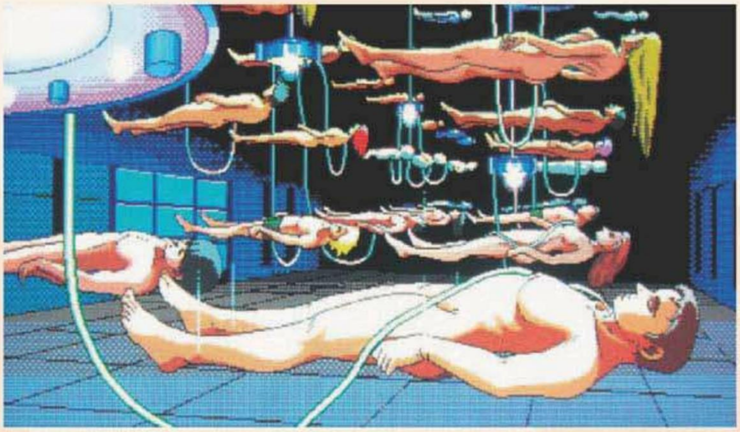
メガ駆動機構

Before *Metal Gear Solid*, Hideo Kojima created *Policenauts*, a point-and-click adventure first released in 1994. It's reputed to have taken him over five years to create and, for some, is regarded as his magnum opus. From the very start it's a game that intrigues and pulls you in, even if you can't speak a word of Japanese. After an anime intro, it begins with an almost Vangelis-style saxophone and guitar composition, followed by classical Konami chanting, while panning over Old LA as our protagonist, Jonathan Ingram, speaks of his past. It's impossibly cool and evokes the same feeling of awe that *Snatcher* did before it. This could indeed be Kojima's finest work, with a greater storyline and a more perfect realisation of its world's inner logic than even *Metal Gear Solid*; adventure games do not come much better than *Policenauts*. As such, it is a travesty of epic proportions that Konami was too narrow-minded, too blinkered, too incompetent, to release it in English in the West.

This shamefully means the only way to experience it is by getting the Japanese original and printing off both a guide and translation notes from the internet. It's a feeling that harks back to the glory days of trying to complete Super Famicom RPGs when they weren't being released outside of Japan and, while you'll never be able to fully appreciate it, there's an undeniable sense of excitement and achievement as you manage to glimpse fractions of *Policenauts*' epic magnificence – it is arguably one of the greatest games never to leave Japan. Let us convince you why.

In the year 2010 the world's first space colony, Beyond Coast, is completed. Three years later a special squad of five policenauts (a portmanteau of police and astronaut) are assigned to maintain security. Jonathan Ingram was one of the first policenauts, but during a freak space-walking accident he drifts off into space and is presumed dead. He is discovered cryogenically frozen and alive 25 years later, not aged a day, while his wife has remarried and his friends have moved on. With his life destroyed, and a newly acquired spacephobia, Jonathan returns to Earth to work as a private investigator in the city of Old LA. He's a man on the edge with nothing left, a habitual chain smoker and borderline alcoholic; the only thing that keeps him going day-to-day is dealing with the scum left behind on Earth. One day his estranged wife stops by, and asks him to take on a case: to return to Beyond Coast and investigate her new husband's mysterious disappearance. Jonathan refuses and she leaves,

N PROMISE



» The bodies are suspended by wires, some attached directly to the bones. What kind of hellish experiments are these? (PC98)



» This bikini girl filled place is the 'Zero-G Garden' on Beyond Coast, where rich people like to go to unwind and relax. (Saturn)



» The freaky man on the left is Tony Redwood, a frozener; these are synthetically created people who are immune to the effects of outer space. (PC98)

but looking through his window he sees footprints by his wife's car, and moments later it explodes, killing her. This leads to an intense shoot-out with a masked bomber who leaves a trail of white blood. Afterwards Jonathan decides to visit the space colony, meet up with his old policenaut buddy Ed Brown, and work out what the hell is going on. This is the start of a case that will unravel a terrifying conspiracy aboard Beyond Coast, with the kind of complicated plot twists and shocking revelations that Kojima is famous for. Though, it has to be said, they're a lot more restrained than his later work.

The gameplay takes a form everyone will recognise: move a mouse pointer and click on hotspots to interactive with them, either by looking, examining, activating or, in the case of people, talking.

As you can see from the screens it's a cinematic experience and Kojima, as always, has referenced many of his favourite films – *Lethal Weapon* (the main characters resemble Riggs and Murtaugh), *Blade Runner, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Bad Blood, New Rose Hotel, Bullitt, Frenzy, Die Hard,* and the list goes on.

Greatly enhancing things and elevating this above the realm of standard adventures are several lightgun shooting sections and a nail-biting bomb-defusal puzzle. The lightgun sections are excellent and give proceedings a greatly appreciated tactile element. Meanwhile, depending on which version you're playing, there's also an insanely comprehensive world encyclopaedia available. This covers every single facet of the future world you find yourself in, from varieties of news agency, laws, medical advancements, global changes, pop culture, and countless other details; hell, it evens lists the varieties of pornography people in the year 2040 are using. We weren't able to count every encyclopaedia entry, but there are well over 200, many being more than a page long. It highlights how detailed Kojima's vision is.

Four main versions were released consecutively, on the NEC PC98, 3DO, PSone, and finally Saturn. The PC98 iteration is desirable because it contains extra dialogue and plot descriptions, but the three-disc Saturn version is the definitive one to play through since it has lightgun support and several features not in the others. Unfortunately, while members of JunkerHQ.net still slave away on a fan-translation, there has still not been any English-language patches released for any of the versions. With UMDs able to hold up to 1.8 gigs of data, we demand that Konami sobers up and gets to work on an official English PSP port. The gaijin world *needs* to experience this game now.



» Meryl Silverburgh really filled herself out and became quite the woman since her FOXHOUND role in *Metal Gear Solid*. (PC98)

Special thanks to members of JunkerHQ.net for assisting with images

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

GOLDEN AXE

IF ONLY ALL JOURNEYS WERE THIS FANTASTIC



- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £35+ FOR ORIGINAL PCB BOARD



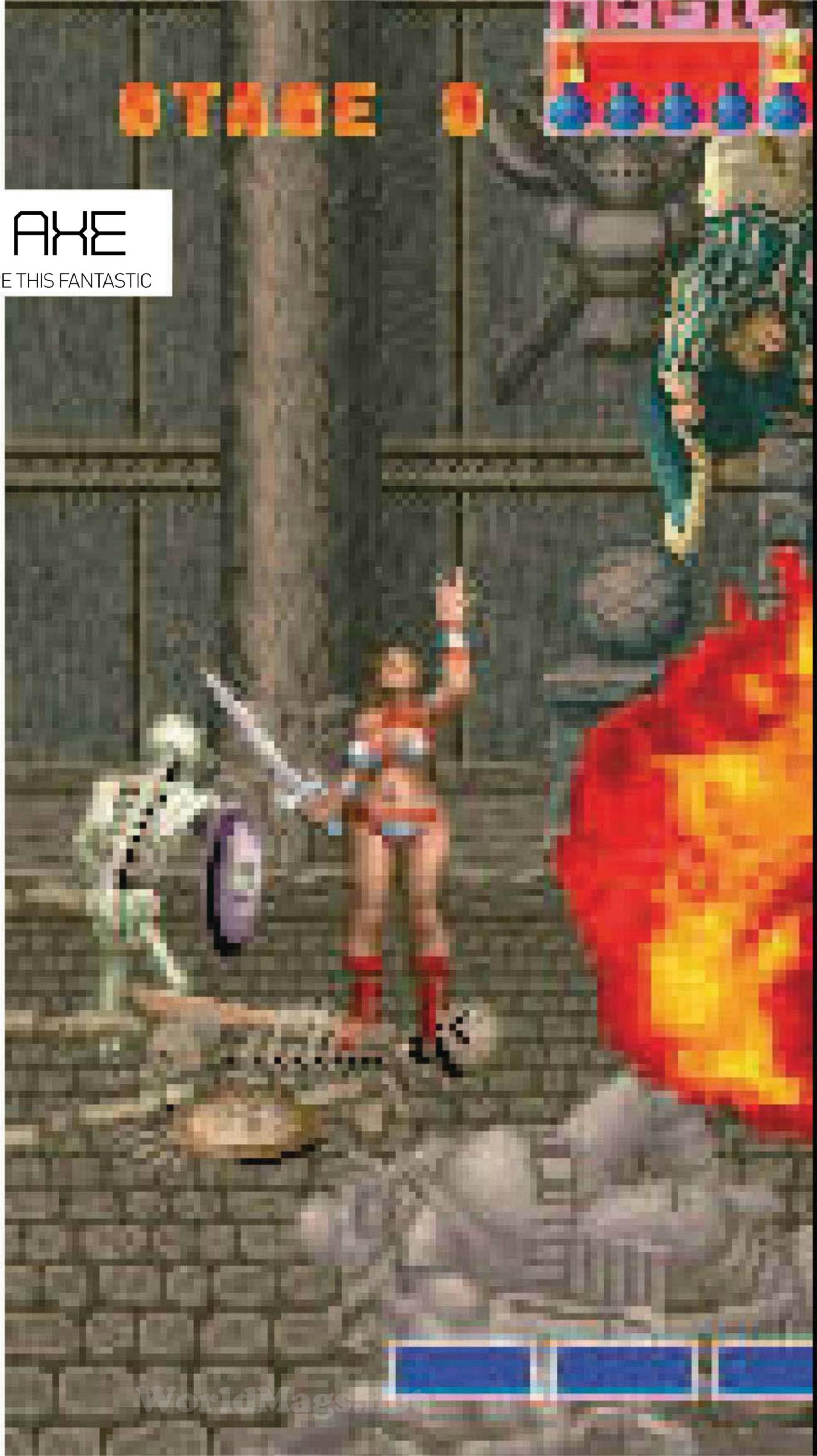
HISTORY

Golden Axe is a strange game. It's not the greatest side-scrolling beat-'em-up ever made, and it rips off plenty of other superb titles, but good grief, is it fun to play through. After all, what other game from the era allowed you to carve up skeletons, ride around on mythical creatures and cast powerful magic? None, that's what.

While the likes of *Rastan* and *Rygar* featured a similar theme, neither contained the fantastical environments that *Golden Axe* boasted. Indeed, in the half-hour it took me to complete the game (I've still got the magic touch), I visited a besieged village and journeyed across the back of a giant turtle, before finally flying to Death Adder's domain via a gigantic flying eagle. Quite a journey, I'm sure you'll agree.

The enemies you face are no less exotic and consist of Harryhausen-styled skeletons (some of the hardest foes in the game, by the way) mace-wielding giants, busty Amazonians and gigantic, armour-clad knights that carry swords longer than your actual character. Yikes! Then, of course, there's the final showdown with old Death Adder himself: a huge monstrosity of a man who wields the titular Golden Axe.

Your able warriors – the stout Dwarf Gilius Thunderhead, beefy barbarian Ax Battler and the sexy Tyris Flare – are more than able to deal with Death Adder's minions, and if you get bored of hacking them up with swords and axes, you can always hop on the back of one of *Golden Axe*'s many mythical beasties and smoke 'em with a handy fireball. If all else fails, then there are your magic potions to rely on. Each warrior favours a certain element – lightning for Gilius, earth for Ax and Fire for Tyris – which can be powered up by kicking the occasional pixie in the arse and grabbing its dropped potion. Who says crime doesn't pay? When your gauge is finally filled, you can let rip with anything from a minor earthquake to summoning this rather impressive fella on the right. I love the smell of burning Death Adder in the morning…

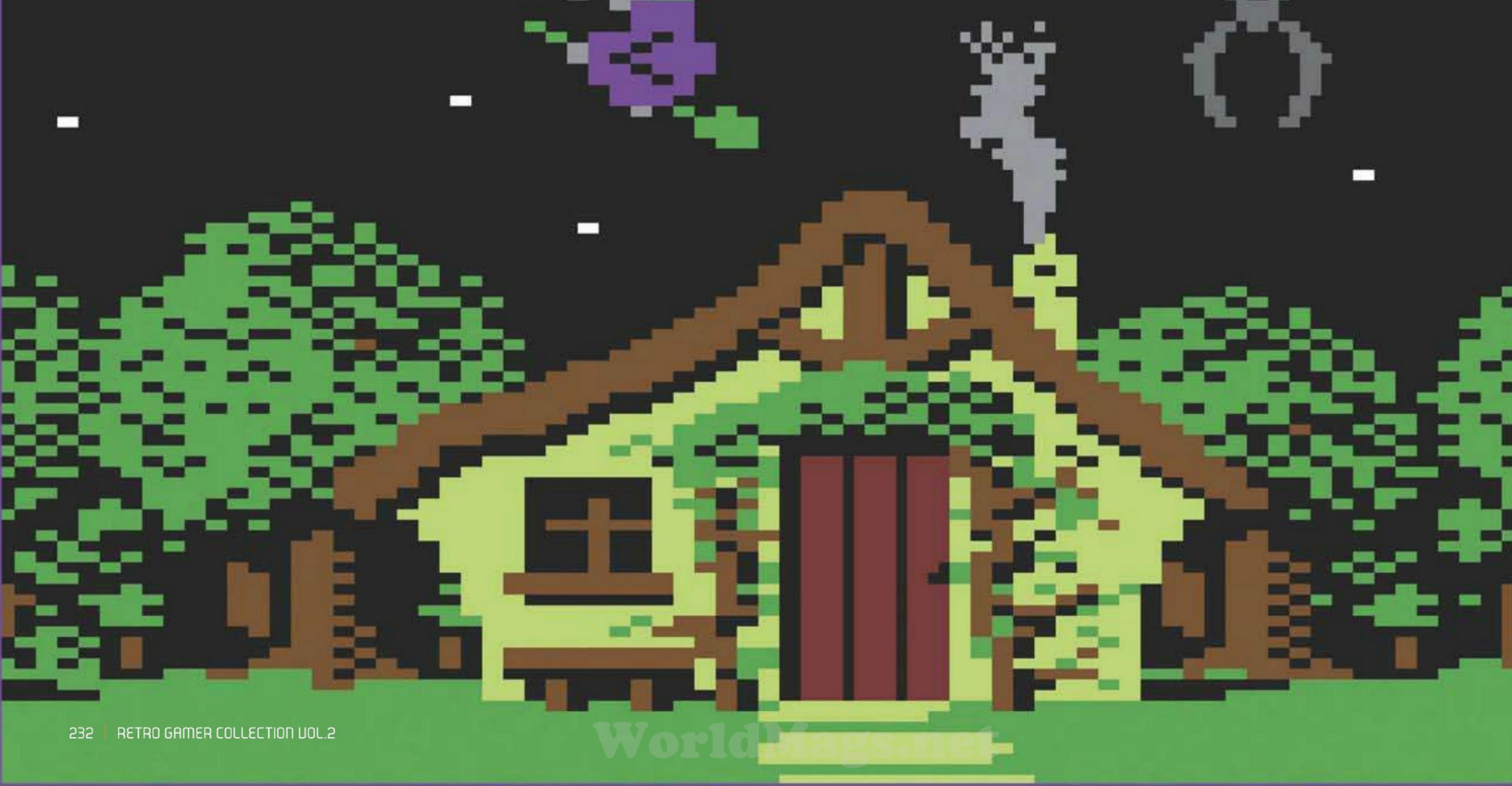



CREDITS 5
PUSH 2P STAR

THE MAKING OF…

CAULDRON AND CAULDRON II

Cauldron and its sequel wowed,
Making Palace Software proud.
Craig Grannell now talks to three,
Men who fashioned fervently,
Bouncing pumpkins, spooks galore,
Crowing witches, and much more.
So read ye now, some history,
And unlock Cauldron's mystery.





» In this house, upon Hallowe'en, lives the witch who'd be Witch Queen!



» Above the graveyard, ghouls attack – fly hard, hag, and watch your back!

"ANOTHER PROBLEM WAS THAT WE PLAYED THE GAME WITH INFINITE LIVES WHEN TESTING, AND WHEN THE LIMITS WERE PUT IN, THE GAME WAS FAR TOO HARD" RICHARD LEINFELLNER

8-bit gamers fondly remember Palace's pair of spooky games. Despite both *Cauldron* and *Cauldron II* being really tough, Palace's skill for designing playable games shone through, resulting in a pair of releases that players stuck with, despite getting regularly splattered by on-screen nasties. "*Cauldron* actually came about because Palace had the rights to the *Halloween* movie", recalls Steve Brown, ex-Palace designer and the man responsible for the look and feel of both games. "The plan was to create a game based on the film, but this seemed a silly concept to me, and nothing I tried really worked." However, the concept of *Halloween* itself, rather than the film, got Brown thinking about pumpkins and witches, and the idea for *Cauldron* just popped into his head during a train journey. "I did some drawings, pitched the idea to [Palace co-founder] Pete Stone, and he unexpectedly said yes."

The game centres around a witch striving to become Witch Queen. She must locate six ingredients, return them to her cottage, do the whole 'hubble, bubble' thing and then defeat the 'Pumpking'. To complicate matters, the ingredients are found in the underworld, and so the witch must first locate keys to open doors while avoiding attacks from life-forms like kamikaze seagulls, hostile flying pumpkins, and other horrors. Unlike most titles of the time, *Cauldron* isn't restricted to one genre – the above-ground sections resemble *Defender* (the witch flying on a broomstick with heavy inertia, landing only to grab objects), while the underground portions are tough platform fare (like *Jet Set Willy* – that is if Matthew Smith's classic was located in underground caverns, populated with flying chunks of magma, and animated skeletons). This mix of genres arrived organically due to each creator's interest in particular games. "I totally loved *Defender* and *Scramble*, whereas Steve was a platform gamer", explains Richard Leinfellner, *Cauldron*'s lead programmer. "One day, we had the witch flying nicely, and Steve asked why there were two distinct game types – sideway-scrollers like *Scramble*, and platformers like *Manic Miner*. I said there was no technical reason why they couldn't be combined, and so we modified the game engine to do both."



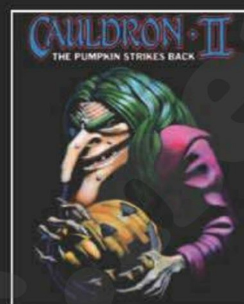
» Avoiding peril underground, our hag resolves to leap and bound.



» Hostile pumpkins aim to kill, but the hag has too much skill!

WITCHCRAFTED

In the modern era of Photoshop and affordable 3D modelling packages, much cover artwork for games is fashioned in CGI. Back in the Eighties, however, various other methods had to be employed, in order to figure out where shadows would fall from an object. Some artists just winged it, but Steve Brown was at the other end of the scale. "For *Cauldron*, I made a Plasticine witch model that was used as reference for the cover paintings", he explains. Just as at the end of *Cauldron II*, time hasn't entirely been kind to the hag, though. "The model's now buried up in the attic in a box somewhere, and the nose fell off in 1998", says Brown. That said, the witch apparently survived longer than some of the computers at Palace back in the day: "Spectrums didn't fare very well at Palace – Richard once threw one out of a second-floor window, and I left one on a train", recalls Brown. If only the rubber-keyed wonder bounced as well as a Palace pumpkin.





CAULDRON AND CAULDRON II



» Magma spews into the sky. Hag, take care, if you must fly.

MYSTICAL MARKETING

In-game marketing has become increasingly common over the years, from the occasional advertising hoarding in football games, to the rather brazen locations in the likes of *Crazy Taxi*. Palace's effort, way back in the mid-Eighties, was a rather more subtle affair. "The design of *Cauldron II*'s map was based around the Palace logo, which was a castle", explains Stan Schembri. "This meant that not only did the game have a tangible form, but also that in those early, naive days of advertising, we were able to have an element of product placement when the map was published." Stan recalls that Steve Brown once spent many hours photographing each screen and then pasting the results together, in order to create a full map of *Cauldron II* for games magazines of the time. "I've also heard comments about the turrets of the castle resembling the witch's hat", notes Stan when we ask about another holistic element within the production, although he claims, "this was a little more down to luck than judgement."



Leinfellner notes that once this was done, *Cauldron* was truly born. "I always like to create something original – people appreciate that", adds Brown. "And so combining the flying and platforming sections seemed like a great idea."

From that spark, Leinfellner recalls that the game came together quickly, but there was clearly great attention to detail when it came to storyline and visuals. "Every game needs good visual design and an interesting concept – it's the hook that you hang the gameplay on, and what draws players into the game", explains Brown. "I planned the look of the game right from the start – the witch was the classic vision of witches that I had in my head, probably from childhood memories of Disney's *Snow White*." Elsewhere, detailed characters arrived from the depths of Brown's imagination, resulting in a visually distinct and appealing game.

If any criticism can be levelled at *Cauldron*, it's that the gameplay can be unforgiving. Landing the witch without getting pummelled by enemies is hard enough, but the pixel-perfect jumping required was surely responsible for numerous smashed joysticks. "Our bad", says Brown. "We should have tested the game the whole way through, rather than just individual parts." Leinfellner adds: "Another problem was that we played the game with infinite lives when testing, and when the limits were put in the game was far too hard."

Many persevered, and the game 'Sizzled' in *Zzap*! ("Excellent combination of zapping, leaping and exploring."), and 'Smashed' in *Crash* ("A large, engaging and difficult game for the arcade player."), despite the Spectrum conversion's above-ground section lacking the scrolling of the Commodore release, replacing it with an awkward flick-screen approximation.

THE PUMPKIN STRIKES BACK

A year on, it was time to work on a follow-up, and again it began in the fertile mind of Steve Brown. However, the game Palace created bore little resemblance to its predecessor, aside from a few graphical touches, and superficially to *Cauldron*'s platform sections. In the sequel, the player takes on the role of a pumpkin warrior – the last survivor from the night the Witch Queen took power. His quest is to enter her huge palace, grab a lock of her hair, and find a cauldron with which to exact revenge, switching things back to the way they were. Various other useful items are scattered around the palace, providing protection from various adversaries.

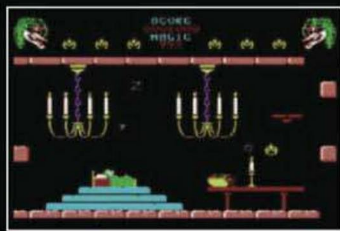
The control method was unique for the time: the pumpkin bounces around the palace, rebounding off walls, making the game an original spin on the genre – something important to Palace. "The idea behind *Cauldron II* was that there should be a sufficient thread to link it to the previous game, but that it should also present new ideas around the platform genre", recalls ex-Palace coder Stan Schembri. "A player would then be sufficiently assured that we'd done our best to create a new game, rather than fobbing them off with more of a successful formula." Brown agrees: "We wanted to make different stuff – plenty of people out there are happy to rehash ideas, but that's a poor waste of a life."

Fittingly, then, it was an item from the final screens of *Cauldron* that inspired the sequel. "I thought the bouncing pumpkin looked cool, and from there, the concept for *Cauldron II* came pretty easily, although some of the guys were dubious about the bouncing." With most games at the time enabling players to exert direct force on the character they were controlling, Palace's direction for *Cauldron II* was a departure, as Schembri explains: "The initial premise was that the pumpkin could only change

> "I LIKE TO CREATE SOMETHING ORIGINAL - PEOPLE APPRECIATE THAT AND SO COMBINING THE FLYING AND PLATFORMING SEEMED LIKE A GREAT IDEA" STEVE BROWN

"THE IDEA BEHIND CAULDRON II WAS THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SUFFICIENT THREAD TO LINK IT TO THE PREVIOUS GAME, BUT THAT IT SHOULD ALSO PRESENT NEW IDEAS AROUND THE PLATFORM GENRE" STAN SCHEMBRI


» This banquet's not a tasty treat – from flying food, you must retreat.


» The sleeping witch, guarded by magic (that kills pumpkins – oh, so tragic).

direction if force was applied to it and it was on a surface that had friction – this meant no changing direction in mid-air." However, it became apparent that this simple concept wasn't easy to realise. "I remember that the bouncing was a nightmare with the collision detection", recalls Leinfellner. "It was far more problematic than first envisaged", adds Schembri. "Once the pumpkin started flying about, it was unpredictable, and if there's one thing that's bound to cause horrific bugs it's unpredictability. Problems such as the pumpkin getting stuck between two surfaces gave me significant headaches." The introduction of a firing mechanism (enabling the pumpkin to attack adversaries) further complicated matters. "It was then possible to exert a force and thus change the pumpkin's direction, when the original intention was just to fire in that direction", says Schembri. "I don't think we ever fully solved that one", he admits.

Despite problems, Brown was pleased with the final result. "The bouncing mechanism needed tweaking, but it turned out pretty much as I imagined", he says. His attention was then directed at creating a menagerie of beasties. Hunchbacks patrol corridors and bats swarm in the forest; elsewhere, huge, deadly spiders roam, and skeletons give chase. In one room, a banquet – complete with pig's head – rises from the table to attack the poor pumpkin. "The nasties were logical evolutions of those in *Cauldron*, and little touches, such as the flying banquet, came from group decisions after initial ideas from Brown", recalls Schembri. "The whole thing was very well storyboarded, and so changes were often made due to flashes of genius." Not every great idea made the game, though: Brown reckons, "50 per cent of my ideas ended up on the cutting-room floor." Ideas such as the story being revealed by a book's pages turning. "Today, this is a simple and often-used technique, but it just wasn't possible in 64 KB", says Schembri. "But that's the nature of games", adds Brown, "there's never enough memory."

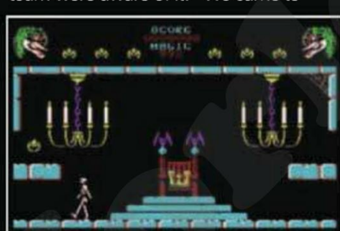
Again, the finished game was well received. *Zzap!64*'s Gary Penn said: "*Cauldron II* looks good, sounds good, and plays even better. Miss it and you'll regret it." Spectrum-land was just as enthusiastic: *Crash* called it, "a very playable and addictive game that's well worth the money", while *Your Sinclair*'s Phil South said: "If it doesn't rate highly in the charts very soon, I'll turn into a pumpkin myself." This high praise was justified for the Spectrum version, which hadn't suffered so much. "*Cauldron II* converted better because there was less reliance on smooth scrolling", explains Leinfellner, although Brown claims that, "scrolling through the castle with the pumpkin would have been better" for all versions, but this, "wasn't possible with the technology of the time."

The only real criticism was the game's difficulty, and Schembri notes that the team were aware of it: "We came to a group decision that it was too hard. Changes were made and the final version is definitely possible to finish." It's tricky to know how difficult to make a game, he says: "Gamers feel cheated if they pay for a game and complete it in an afternoon, but the same is true if you can't get anywhere – it's a delicate balance." But with gamers still trying to free legions of bouncing pumpkins 20 years on, it's clear the Palace team did something right when crafting its duo of spooky games. "We put everything into all our games, and without meaning to sound big-headed, we knew they were good", says Brown. "That said, *Cauldron*'s level of success was unexpected. I guess good, uncomplicated gameplay and cuteness has given the *Cauldron* games longevity." Schembri also reckons solid teamwork helped make the games what they are: "There was great team spirit when working on them, and we were also pioneers, creating games at the start of the home computer explosion. If I'm honest, the celebrity element was exciting, although with the bad good comes the bad – there were many marathon sessions to meet deadlines and we'd often become human versions of the zombie sprite featured in the game!"


» Goblins guard the castle door, but water kills pumpkins for sure.


» Pull the lever, plug the floor, or drop down far and end up sore.


» Climb the turret, ever higher – hero pumpkins never tire.


» The hag's crown sits upon the throne, guarded by a man of bone.

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** RICHARD LEINFELLNER, STEVE BROWN, STAN SCHEMBRI
- » **RELEASED:** 1985/6
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE EVIL DEAD
SYSTEMS: C64, SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986

BARBARIAN
SYSTEMS: C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI ST, AMIGA
YEAR: 1987



BLOOD SIMPLE – THE HISTORY OF

MORTAL KOMBAT

MORTAL KOMBAT A-Z

When Mortal Kombat burst onto arcade screens in a shower of gore back in 1992, few would have predicted that it would go on to become one of Midway's most enduring and successful franchises. Darran Jones takes a look back at the series' illustrious history, while trying to learn every Fatality.

Midway's *Mortal Kombat* franchise is now over 15 years old and, like many petulant teenagers of the same age, it has gone through a variety of changes – some good, a fair few bad – as it has desperately struggled to recapture the greatness it once enjoyed during the mid Nineties.

Mortal Kombat: Armageddon was released for Nintendo's Wii, and not only has the machine's innovative controller helped to breathe new life into what some gamers was fearing had become a rapidly stagnating series, it has also proven that there's still plenty of mileage in one of gaming's most brutal franchises, even if it is now seen as a shadow of its former self. But wait, we're getting somewhat ahead of ourselves. We're only in the second paragraph and are already praising a new release, so let's remember that we are actually a retro gaming publication, borrow Richard Burton's time machine and head back to good old 1992.

Hmm, Burton's machine must be on the blink, as instead of arriving at *Mortal Kombat*'s first public unveiling, we're outside the offices of Midway, and it's 1991, not 1992!

"What you have to remember is that the original game was our response to a number of things", begins co-creator Ed Boon. "Obviously *Street Fighter II* was huge in 1991 and Midway had not entered into the fighting arena yet. We also had this new digitised images technology, which, at the time, was state of the art, and we wanted to do a game that would lend itself to big images. Finally we were all fans of those cool (and sometimes cheesy) martial arts movies like *Enter The Dragon*, *Bloodsport* and *Big Trouble In Little China*."

As a result of all these different reasons, work on *Mortal Kombat* surged ahead and Boon, co-creator John Tobias and the rest of the four-man team were soon on their way to creating a rival to Capcom's incredibly successful sequel. While the small team was confident of their new title, they knew full well the might of what they were up against and were not arrogant enough to assume they had a '*Street Fighter II* beater' on their hands.

"I don't think we were ever dreaming *that* big at the time", laughs Boon. That would have been like trying to come up with a 'Windows beater' operating system."

With Midway wanting to counter the success of Capcom's seemingly unstoppable beat-'em-up behemoth as quickly as possible, Boon soon encountered his first major problem: time – or lack thereof. "*Mortal Kombat* was put together in an

A is for Animality: Special finishing move that sees the victorious character changing into a unique animal form and killing his opponent.

B is for Blocking: Unlike many other fighters, *Mortal Kombat* has an actual block button.

C is for Comic: Such was its popularity, a comic was released in 1992. The official comics were by Midway, while the non-canon versions were by Malibu Comics and ran from 1994 to 1995.

D is for *Defenders of the Realm*: A cartoon series voiced by Luke Perry, Clancy Brown and Ron Perlman. It was released in 1996 and ran for 13 episodes.

E is for Ed Boon: Co-creator of *Mortal Kombat*.

F is for Fatality: Signature death moves that are performed on stunned characters.

G is for "Get Over Here!": Chant heard whenever Scorpion uses his spear attack.

H is for Hydro: The friend of Sub-Zero has the ability to control water. He is a new character from the *Mortal Kombat* comic line.

I is for Ice-T: The notable rapper is said to be a huge fan of the original *Mortal Kombat*.

J is for John Tobias: Co-creator of *Mortal Kombat*.

K is for Kombat Kodes: Special six-digit codes that can be entered into *Mortal Kombat 3* and that alter gameplay mechanics and let you fight hidden characters.

L is for Liu Kang: Champion of the original *Mortal Kombat* tournament who was eventually turned into an undead zombie after being murdered by Shang Tsung.

M is for Mortal Monday: Mortal Monday was coined to anticipate the arrival of *Mortal Kombat*'s home console release.

N is for Noob Saibot: The original Sub-Zero, and co-creators Boon and Tobias's surnames spelt backwards. Since Tobias left the company this character is now referred to as Noob.

O is for Outworld: A magical realm populated by dark forests, barren deserts and pools of acid. Is ruled in secret by The One Being.

P is for Pac-Man: A carving of Pac-Man can be seen on the right wall of the Palace Gates stage in the original game.

Q is for Quan Chi: A powerful sorcerer and necromancer who we're only including because we can't think of anything else beginning with Q.

R is for Raiden: God of thunder who was played by the not very god-like Christopher Lambert in the original *Mortal Kombat* movie.

S is for Steve Ritchie: The announcer of *Mortal Kombat I* and *II* claims he came up with the name '*Mortal Kombat*'. Midway chose '*Mortal*'.

T is for TV series: *Mortal Kombat: Conquest* appeared in 1998 and was a prequel to the events of the first film. Starred Kristanna Loken who went on to become the T-X in *Terminator 3*.

U is for *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*: DS iteration that was announced by Ed Boon, featuring wireless play and Puzzle Kombat.

V is for Version Exclusives: Over the years, numerous titles have received exclusive content to help set them apart from other versions of the game.

W is for Wave Net: A rare online network for *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* that was only tested in Chicago and San Francisco.

X is for X-Rated Action: The dark themes of the *Mortal Kombat* series have meant it's constantly running foul of the ESRB and ELSPA.

Y is for Yamaha: An inferior soundboard that was dropped in favour of Williams' DCS sound system for *Mortal Kombat II*.

Z is for Zeus: The arcade hardware that was used for *Mortal Kombat 4*.

Rogues Gallery
A BRIEF RUNDOWN OF MORTAL KOMBAT'S MAIN

Ashrah
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat Deception*
Best Signature Move: Nature's Torpedo
Best Fatality: Magic Melt

Baraka
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Head Swipe
Best Fatality: Decapitation

Bo' Rai Cho
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Puke Puddle
Best Fatality: Belly Flop

Chameleon
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*
Best Signature Move: Speedy Serpent
Best Fatality: Spine Rip

Cyrax
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Detonator
Best Fatality: Self-Destruct

Daegon
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon*
Best Signature Move: Fiery Hands
Best Fatality: Body Bash

Dairou
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Stealthy Shadows
Best Fatality: Rib Eye Gouger

Darrius
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Chest Cruncher
Best Fatality: Body Part Rearranger

Drahmin
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Propeller Clock
Best Fatality: Iron Bash

Ermac
First Appearance: *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Telekinetic Slam
Best Fatality: Telekinetic Massacre

Goro
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Chest Pound
Best Fatality: Skin Rip

Havik
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Torso Spin
Best Fatality: Arm Eater

Hotaru
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Grasshopper
Best Fatality: Do The Twist

Hsu Hao
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Bouncing Death
Best Fatality: Laser Slicer

Jade
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Razor-Rang
Best Fatality: Decapitation

Jarek
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 4*
Best Signature Move: Lasso Snatch
Best Fatality: Heart Rip

Jax Briggs
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Ground Pound
Best Fatality: Arm Rip

Johnny Cage
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Split Punch
Best Fatality: Torso Rip

Kano
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Eye Laser
Best Fatality: Open Heart Surgery

Kenshi
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Tele-Flurry
Best Fatality: Telekinetic Crush

Khameleon
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*
Best Signature Move: Square Wave
Best Fatality: Bone Stripper

Kintaro
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Rapid Fireball
Best Fatality: Skin Rip

Kira
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Kiss Of Death
Best Fatality: Stomach Ripper

Kitana
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Fan Toss
Best Fatality: Head Chop

Kobra
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Chi-Blast
Best Fatality: Heart Ripper

Kung Lao
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Hat Throw
Best Fatality: Hat Trick

Mavado
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Anger Management
Best Fatality: Kick Thrust

Meat
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 4*
Best Signature Move: Head Roll
Best Fatality: Head Rip

Mileena
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Teleport Kick
Best Fatality: Bone Stripper

Mokap
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Charge Punch
Best Fatality: Head Rip

Moloch
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Suction Breath
Best Fatality: Head Rip

Motaro
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Tail Projectile
Best Fatality: Decapitation

Nightwolf
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Spirit Arrow
Best Fatality: Vanishing Light

Nitara
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Blood Spit
Best Fatality: Blood Thirst

Quan Chi
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*
Best Signature Move: Skull Toss
Best Fatality: Neck Stretcher

Raiden
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Lightning Bolt
Best Fatality: Electrocution

Rain
First Appearance: *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Lightning Lift
Best Fatality: Uppercut

Reiko
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 4*
Best Signature Move: Vertical Teleport
Best Fatality: Shuriken Shower

Reptile
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Power Slide
Best Fatality: Tasty Meal

Sareena
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*
Best Signature Move: Split Kick
Best Fatality: Demon Fang

Scorpion
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Bloody Spear
Best Fatality: Toasty

Sektor
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Chest Missile
Best Fatality: Flamethrower

Sheeva
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Untamed Fury
Best Fatality: Skin Rip

Shinnok
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*
Best Signature Move: Summoned Fiend
Best Fatality: Hand From Hell

Shujinko
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Flip Scissor Kick
Best Fatality: Body Slicer

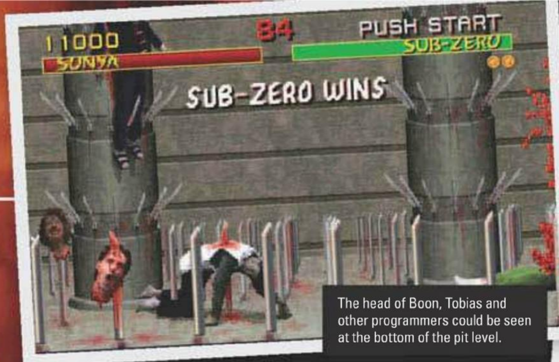
Sindel
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Banshee Scream
Best Fatality: Super Scream

Smoke
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Air Throw
Best Fatality: Teleport Punch

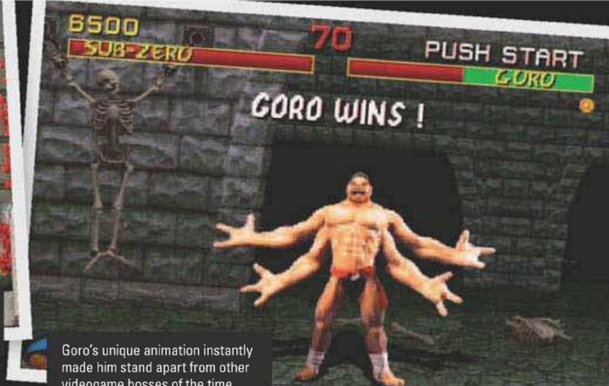
Sonya Blade
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Leg Grab
Best Fatality: Kiss Of Death

Stryker
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Grenade
Best Fatality: Tazer

Sub-Zero
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Freeze
Best Fatality: Head Rip



The head of Boon, Tobias and other programmers could be seen at the bottom of the pit level.



Goro's unique animation instantly made him stand apart from other videogame bosses of the time.

incredibly fast time", he confirms. "I'd say that from start to finish it took us roughly eight months, and the biggest problem we encountered was trying to do the game in such a small time frame. Thankfully, once we got the basic fighting down and everyone was so excited about that aspect of the game, the rest of the gameplay just sort of fell into place."

Wanting to stay away from the potentially daunting six-button setup that had served *Street Fighter II* so well, Midway instead devised a four-button system for alternating high and low punches and kicks, while a fifth button was controversially dedicated to blocking (many fighting games of the time and even today, including *Street Fighter II*, simply required you to pull back on the joystick).

"We always found it odd that you would get a 'free block' if someone was attacking you while you were walking backwards", explains Boon about their unusual decision. "We felt blocking should be a much more deliberate action that the player should initiate, as opposed to sometimes being done automatically."

Another gameplay mechanic that helped *Mortal Kombat* stand out from its peers was the inclusion of juggling, which enabled a skilled fighter to continually pummel his opponent while they were helpless in the air. Like the combos of *Street Fighter II*, the juggling system was discovered by accident while the game was being tested.

"The juggling was something that we discovered was in the game pretty early on and we decided to expand on it. When someone accidentally got two or three hits on their opponent their reaction was always positive. Whenever something unintentionally fun happens in one of our games, we try to develop it further."

With juggling, advanced blocking and the combat system in place, everyone considered what could be done to counteract the bold aesthetics of *Street Fighter II*. Ken, Ryu, Chun-Li and the rest of the *Street Fighter* gang were already instantly recognisable figures in arcades around the world thanks to Capcom's distinctive stylings and the vibrant colours that had been used. So rather than emulate Capcom's cheerful-looking brawler, Midway used technology that was more in keeping with its new bloody creation. *Q*bert* creator Warren Davis had already been honing his video digitisation skills for several years before the release of *Mortal Kombat*, so by the time it was finally utilised for Midway's new fighter the technology produced suitably impressive results.

> Another gameplay mechanic that helped Mortal Kombat stand out from its peers was the inclusion of juggling

"Digitised graphics were state of the art at the time", recalls Boon about Midway's decision to use the new technology. "People were used to seeing the more 'cartoony' graphics of *Street Fighter* and other games, so our graphics looked much more realistic by comparison."

He certainly wasn't wrong and considering the brutal combat that took place in each fearsome match, the gritty, realistic look was for more suitable for *Mortal Kombat*'s mature content. And what mature content it was. Many of the moves – while not being as well



Blaze
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Quake Slam
Best Fatality: N/A

CHARACTERS



Frost
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Ice Puddle
Best Fatality: Ice Shatter



Fujin
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*
Best Signature Move: Tornado Wind
Best Fatality: Wind Skinner



Kabal
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 3*
Best Signature Move: Sawblades
Best Fatality: Head Inflation



Kai
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 4*
Best Signature Move: Rising Heel
Best Fatality: Body Breaker



Li Mei
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance*
Best Signature Move: Sparkler
Best Fatality: Super Crush Kick



Liu Kang
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Flying Bicycle Kick
Best Fatality: Dragon



Noob Saibot
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Disabler
Best Fatality: Teleport Slam



Onaga
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Deception*
Best Signature Move: Dirty Face
Best Fatality: Decapitation



Shang Tsung
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat*
Best Signature Move: Morphing
Best Fatality: Soultaker



Shao Kahn
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat II*
Best Signature Move: Ridicule
Best Fatality: Human Nail



Tanya
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat 4*
Best Signature Move: Surging Blast
Best Fatality: Twisted Kiss



Taven
First Appearance: *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon*
Best Signature Move: Godly Charge
Best Fatality: Wrath

Mortal Movies

Paul WS Anderson is normally a name to be feared if you're a fan of the *Resident Evil* franchise or *Alien vs Predator*, but back in 1995 he actually achieved the impossible and created a decent videogame-to-film adaptation of *Mortal Kombat*, starring Christopher Lambert as Raiden.

After the misfires of both *Street Fighter: The Movie* and *Super Mario Bros*, Anderson's interpretation was considered something of a success and managed to gross an impressive worldwide figure of over $122 million. Indeed, before the arrival of the Angelina Jolie vehicle *Tomb Raider* it was the most successful videogame-to-film offering of all time and allowed Anderson to move on to such projects as *Event Horizon* and the aforementioned *Resident Evil*.

A sequel, *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, followed in 1997 but lacked the charm and authenticity of Anderson's original. Both Lambert and Anderson were no longer attached, the vast majority of the original cast was nowhere to be seen and many of the fight scenes were poorly choreographed.

A third film, again starring Christopher Lambert as the god of lightning, is tentatively scheduled for a 2010 release date and is said to be a brand new re-imagination of the franchise.



The original *Mortal Kombat* movie wasn't too bad and was a massive success at the box office.

animated as Capcom's effort – were extremely savage and ranged from the *Street Fighter*-styled fireballs of Liu Kang to the flamboyant splits and swift punch to the crotch of Johnny Cage. Blood flowed like a river from each of the seven main characters and the bone-crunching effects only heightened the wince-inducing injuries that the pugilists constantly suffered. While Scorpion's bloody spear attack – followed by a swift "Get over here!" – is arguably *Mortal Kombat*'s most iconic move, it was the gruesome Fatalities that helped raise its status amongst gamers and had censor groups the world over twitching their

> Midway was told by the family-friendly Nintendo of America that the graphical content would have to be toned down

typewriters with excitement.

After all, it's not every day that you can control a character that can reach into someone's chest and pull their still-beating heart out, leaving the lifeless body to slump to the floor. However, that's exactly what you could do once you worked out Kano's Fatality (it's back, down, forward, light punch when standing close to your opponent in case you're wondering). Other memorable Fatalities from the first game included Sub-Zero ripping off his foe's head and proudly displaying it with the spinal cord still attached, Sonya Blade using a lingering kiss to turn the unlucky opponent into a pillar of flame, and Raiden's ability to use lightning to pop any person's head off their shoulders.

"Everyone on the team contributed ideas for the Fatalities", recalls Boon about *Mortal Kombat*'s most distinctive hallmark. "There were also plenty of them that we thought were crossing the line and didn't include. Most of them had to do with technical limitations, but there certainly were some that were rejected because they went into the category of 'bad taste'."

Indeed, such was the extremity of its death moves (and the game's overall tone) that action was swiftly taken against Midway's new arcade hit. Helped in part by Sega's FMV title *Night Trap*, which depicted a group of teenagers being stalked by vampiric foes, the two titles are arguably responsible for the forming of the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board), which began regulating the content of all videogames upon its establishment in 1994.

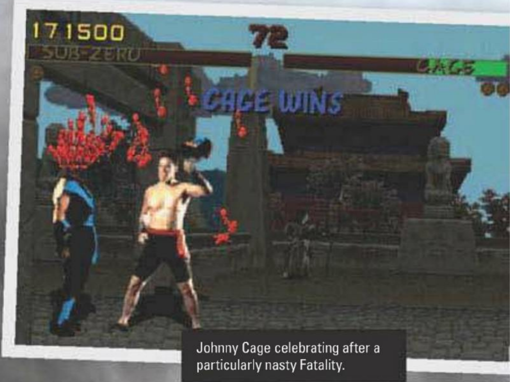
The ESRB wasn't the only ones unhappy with *Mortal Kombat*'s gruesome content, and when the hit game was converted to Nintendo's SNES, Midway was told by the family-friendly Nintendo of America that the graphical content would have to be toned down. As a result, all the blood was taken out of the SNES release and the Fatalities were greatly toned down. Therefore, if you were a console owner and wanted the 'true' version of *Mortal Kombat*, Sega's Mega Drive was the machine to go for. Sega actually exploited this by directly promoting Acclaim's Mega Drive version.

"When we found out that the blood would have to be replaced with 'sweat', we knew that [the SNES] version was doomed", recalls Boon about Nintendo's dramatic decision. "Thankfully, by the time *Mortal Kombat II* came out, Nintendo decided it was okay to have the blood and that version turned out to be perfect. Great graphics, great gameplay and lots of blood!"

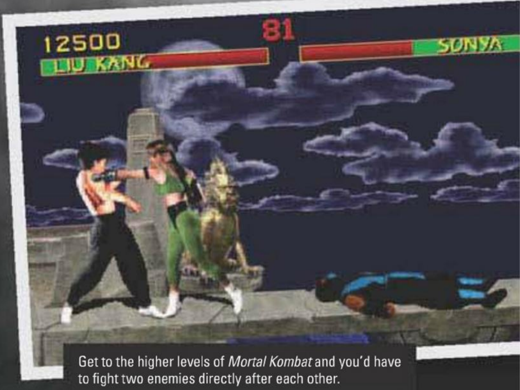
If Boon was pleased that Nintendo had relaxed its policies by the time *Mortal Kombat*'s sequel was released, he was less than happy with the involvement he had with the home console and computer versions of the earlier games.

"While we did have approval rights to the various home versions, the approval itself was kind of vague, which (unfortunately) allowed some issues that we had with the game to go unaddressed", he sadly recalls. "The SNES and Genesis versions of the original game, for example, were dramatically different in terms of presentation, graphics and actual gameplay. The same thing happened with the movies and TV series."

Boon may have had concerns with the various home versions, but that didn't stop gamers, and the title that



Johnny Cage celebrating after a particularly nasty Fatality.



Get to the higher levels of *Mortal Kombat* and you'd have to fight two enemies directly after each other.



Defeating *Mortal Kombat*'s final boss made for spectacular viewing.











Notable Conversions of Mortal Kombat

MASTER SYSTEM
It certainly tries, but the Master System just can't cope with *Mortal Kombat*'s complexity. While the machine's limited graphical capabilities made a fair stab at recreating the arcade's visuals, much of the core game was missing. There were only two stages and six characters (Kano is missing), and the lack of buttons made it very hard to pull off special moves and Fatalities.

MEGA DRIVE
Now this is more like it. You had to have a six-button pad and input a special code that unlocked the blood in order to get the full *Mortal Kombat* experience, but this is generally considered to be the most complete version of the game in terms of actual authenticity. Aesthetically, however, it's not quite up to the superior-looking SNES version. Worth tracking down, though.

GAME BOY
While it boasts some fairly solid visuals, this is otherwise a very poor effort that has similar issues to the lacklustre Master System outing. This time, though, there's no Johnny Cage, the controls are even fiddlier to use and the horrendous music will make you want to sew up your ears so it can't destroy your sanity. A shambolic release that should be avoided at all costs.

SNES
This could have been the best home version, but Nintendo of America's strict policies of the time meant that many were turned off by the SNES outing's lack of blood. Another issue was that it featured a different combo system from the original arcade game. The SNES version is certainly a good effort and worth picking up if you're a fan, but the lack of blood is very annoying.

AMIGA
Amazingly, you could actually play this impressive-looking Amiga version with just one fire button. And while it was far from perfect, it was much better than some of its console brethren. Mega Drive and SNES owners wouldn't have been convinced, but Amiga purists had a fun fighter they could really sink their teeth into. A very solid effort that works very well.



No your eyes aren't deceiving you. An unofficial port of *Mortal Kombat* was released for the Spectrum and appeared in Russia.

had caused *Street Fighter II* cabinets to lie forgotten in arcades was soon achieving the same success at home. Midway, Tobias and Boon wanted more though, and with the word 'Fatality' still ringing in gamers' ears, the talented duo set to work on a sequel that would be bolder, brasher and, of course, much, much gorier…

Realising that they had the makings of a huge franchise on their hands, Tobias and Boon's plans for their bloodthirsty sequel were simple: they just did a Spinal Tap and turned everything up to 11. The seven combatants from the original game were boosted by a further five fighters, including the dual-blade-wielding Baraka, Jax Briggs (who went on to star in the truly terrible *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces*) and green ninja Reptile, whom gamers had first encountered as a hidden character in the arcade original.

The increased character roster wasn't the only enhancement that Midway had included. The sequel had a far darker theme, both in tone and graphically when compared with *Mortal Kombat* – a good example being the black dragon logo that was used now used – and this extended to the popular Fatalities that could be used to decimate your opponent. Each character now had two distinct Fatalities - Shang Tsung had three - with many of them making the barbaric moves from *Mortal Kombat* look like minor indiscretions instead of the gruesome acts they so obviously were. Johnny Cage had learnt to tear a person in half since his last tournament, while US Special Forces agent Jax would rip the arms off anybody that gave him gip. Shang Tsung could rip his opponent's soul from them, while Reptile would simply eat his opponent's head. Best of all, though, was Liu Kang's Dragon Fatality that allowed him to morph into a huge green dragon and bite his adversary in half.

As well as a variety of vicious death moves, characters could also use certain stages to finish off their opponents – or, for total humiliation, the new Babalities and Friendships that Midway had included. Babalities would simply turn your opponent into a screaming infant, while Friendships resulted in your fighter giving his nemesis a wrapped present instead of finishing him off with a deadly attack. Extremely hard to pull off, both Babalities and Friendships had players rabidly awaiting the release of each new magazine of the time in the hope that the latest moves would be revealed and they could try them out at the local arcade.

While plenty of new finishing moves had been created, gamers were somewhat concerned that *Mortal Kombat II*'s core gameplay hardly differed from its popular predecessor. Although a few minor adjustments had been made to the core fighting mechanics – crouching punches being just one example - the standard moves were essentially unchanged from *Mortal Kombat*. Each character may have looked different, but unlike Capcom's pugilists, the Midway fighters performed exactly the same attack styles and as a result experts could pretty much beat novices with whomever they chose. This was no doubt a result of Midway's original decision to use digitised characters

Off the beaten track

TWEAKED UPDATES AND DIRE SPIN-OFFS… THE VERY BEST AND WORST OF THE MORTAL KOMBAT FRANCHISE.



ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT 3
Released: 1995 onwards
Systems: Arcade, Mega Drive, PlayStation 2, Saturn, Super NES, 360 XBLA
This tweaked version of *Mortal Kombat 3* contained two new tournament modes, as well as a variety of new moves for several characters including Sonya and Liu Kang. There were also new characters, as all the missing ninjas that appeared in both *Mortal Kombat* and its sequel had now been included.



MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY
Released: 1996
Systems: Game.com, Nintendo 64, PC, PlayStation, Saturn
Not three separate games, but an amalgamation that contains every character from the first three titles. New features included an Aggressor Bar, a Brutality move which causes an opponent to explode, and more new moves. The N64 version offered 3-on-3 simultaneous battles and an exclusive female character called Khameleon.



MORTAL KOMBAT MYTHOLOGIES: SUB-ZERO
Released: 1997
Systems: N64, PlayStation
It is incredible to think that *Mythologies* sold over 1 million units, as it truly is one of the worst gaming turds that you're ever likely to encounter. It was critically panned the world over and is a terrifyingly bad game that features atrocious gameplay and tired-looking aesthetics. Even the most die-hard aficionados will despise it.



MORTAL KOMBAT GOLD
Released: 1999
Systems: Dreamcast
Released exclusively for Sega's Dreamcast, *Mortal Kombat Gold* was a next-generation update of *Mortal Kombat 4* that featured several characters that hadn't appeared in the original game, including Kitana, Mileena, Baraka and Sektor. Sadly, the original release was riddled with bugs – so many, in fact, that a revision was released – and it looked vastly inferior to Namco's *Soul Calibur*.



MORTAL KOMBAT: SPECIAL FORCES
Released: 2000
Systems: PlayStation
If you thought *Mythologies* was bad, you've obviously had the fortune to not encounter the dire *Special Forces*. Widely considered to be the worst ever *Mortal Kombat* title, *Special Forces* marked the departure of co-creator John Tobias and several other key Midway staff. As a result the planned N64 version was cancelled and the game was quickly rushed for a budget release.



MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS
Released: 2005
Systems: PlayStation2, Xbox
It's quite possible that Shaolin Monks is the standalone adventure that Boon and Tobias had envisioned when Mythologies was created. Although not without its flaws, it's a clever arcade adventure that finally puts to rest the travesties of Mythologies and Special Forces. There's an inspired 'Ko-op' mode, lots of frenzied fighting and some enjoyable mini-games. The best spin-off by a country mile.



MORTAL KOMBAT: UNCHAINED
Released: 2006
Systems: PlayStation Portable
Unchained was an update of *Mortal Kombat: Deception* but included eight extra characters, including four from the 2002 release *Deadly Alliance*. Midway also included a brand new Endurance mode and the ability to play wirelessly against other PSP owners. While reasonably good fun, it's let down by the PSP's clunky D-pad and awkwardly placed buttons.

THE HISTORY OF MORTAL KOMBAT



Jax performing his arm rip Fatality in *Mortal Kombat II*. Now that's going to hurt.

Happy Easter



With the success of *Mortal Kombat*, Midway was keen to give something back to the fans that had helped make the game such a massive hit. As a result, *Mortal Kombat II* contained a number of hidden features that would activate when certain buttons were pressed or in-game requirements were fulfilled.

The most famous is obviously Dan Forden, who would appear in the bottom right of the screen and shout "Toasty!" (and occasionally "Frosty!" if Sub-Zero was being used) whenever a character performed a perfect uppercut. While Forden made his first appearance in *Mortal Kombat II*, the move became so popular that it returned in later games as well.

Other Easter eggs that appeared in Midway's sequel included a clone of Atari's classic coin-op *Pong* that would appear after the 250th two-player game had been played (this only appeared in the arcades and not the home versions) and a 'Fergality' that was exclusive to the Mega Drive release. By selecting 'Oooh Nasty!' from the cheat menu, choosing Raiden and fighting in the Armoury, your defeated opponent would turn into the former founder and CEO of Probe Entertainment, Fergus McGovern, when they were eventually killed.

and it wouldn't be until *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* that each fighter would develop their own distinct fighting styles.

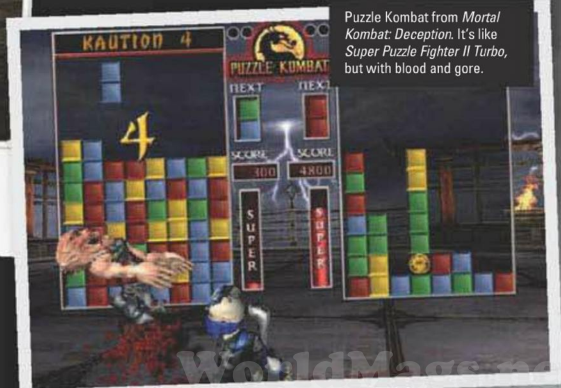
Mortal Kombat II's fighting, while a whole lot of fun, may have still looked archaic when compared to the graceful fluidity of *Street Fighter II*, but the majority of gamers didn't seem to mind and it became another huge success for Midway that spawned several impressive ports (blood thankfully now intact). Learning Babalities, Fatalities and Friendships would only keep gamers happy for so long though, so Boon and Tobias set to work on their next creation, the imaginatively named *Mortal Kombat 3*.

Although many hardcore fans will decree Midway's third *Mortal Kombat* game to be the best in the series, just as many felt it was the beginning of the end for the still massively popular franchise. After trailing behind Midway in the popularity stakes, Capcom went back to the drawing board and came back with *Street Fighter Alpha*: a complete reinvention of the series that featured a brand new fighting system and superb cartoon visuals. While Midway had been constantly adding subtle gameplay tweaks to its franchise since the release of *Mortal Kombat*, its once-exciting series was suddenly looking rather tired. Midway carried on regardless, though, and the faithful were treated to a number of new features including a 'Run' button, pre-programmed button presses called 'Chain Combos' (which are unblockable if a strike is landed) and a new 'Animality' move that would see the selected fighter change into a specific animal before mauling his fallen opponent. Other juicy additions were the ability to choose specific difficulty levels, 'Kombat Kodes' that could be entered on the 'Versus' screen and would modify various gameplay mechanics, and a new 'Mercy' move that would give a stunned opponent a small amount of health back so you could use a Fatality on them. It was even possible to knock your opponent through the ceilings on certain levels so you could continue your fight in brand new stages. Many new characters were also added, including a trio of cyborgs called Cyrax, Smoke and Sektor. Like the ninjas before them, all three characters were essentially modelled on the same actor, in this case Sal Divita.

Frustratingly for fans, the arrival of several new combatants meant that not all the original fighters had made the roster, and as a result Johnny Cage, Scorpion, Reptile and Raiden were nowhere to be seen. The absence of many of the characters was due to Daniel Pesina (the actor who played Cage and the game's various ninjas) being fired for appearing in an ad for a rival fighting game called *Blood Storm*, and helping Data East (along with his brother who played Raiden) to make its own realistic brawler called *Tattoo Assassins*. Fans were furious with the absence of the popular characters and they eventually appeared in Midway's revised update, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, although now played by new actors.

Despite several successful ports, Tobias and Boon knew that their series needed a drastic rethink, and while the 1997 release of *Street Fighter III* would see Capcom sticking with its tried and tested 2D format, Midway finally decided that the time was right to make the brave leap to the third dimension. Boon was concerned about how the game would play in 3D, though, especially as the 1996 3D release of *Street Fighter EX* hadn't been greatly received by Capcom's die-hard faithful. Although *EX* was still essentially a 2D game in a 3D engine, it featured very complex animation that Boon felt impeded the gameplay. As a result, he decided to stick with the tried and tested formulae of previous *Mortal Kombat* titles and the final gameplay was practically identical to its 2D predecessors. This decision once again split fans, as compared to the majesty of Namco's *Soul Calibur*, *Mortal Kombat 4* felt rather primitive, despite utilising a brand new game engine named Zeus. It lacked the eight-way movement of Namco's outstanding fighter and couldn't hope to match it in the aesthetics department – and let's not forget the stunningly fluid animation and absorbing gameplay of the *Virtua Fighter* franchise, which was already in its third incarnation by the time Midway's own 3D fighter was eventually released. All of a sudden *Mortal Kombat*, which had wowed gamers with its over-the-top gameplay, realistic visuals and incredibly gory finishing moves, was starting to look a little tired and for many followers it never recovered. Even several new characters like Shinnok (a fallen Elder God), Fujin and Quan Chi, who had all appeared in the dire *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*, weren't enough to save it, and while it was another success for Midway – mainly due to its aggressive marketing campaign – it was the last title in the franchise to be released in the arcades. *Mortal Kombat* needed a new home, and a new direction, if it was to recapture the hearts of its fans. A 128-bit stopgap appeared in the form of *Mortal Kombat Gold* on Sega's Dreamcast in


Mortal Kombat: Armageddon on the Wii makes it much easier to perform special moves and Fatalities, thanks to the Remote.



Puzzle Kombat from *Mortal Kombat: Deception*. It's like *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, but with blood and gore.

Tell me a story



One thing that sets the *Mortal Kombat* series apart from other fighting franchises is its in-depth storyline, which has become more convoluted and fragmented as the series has progressed. It's far too lengthy to detail here, but it essentially deals with the Outworld trying to conquer the Earthrealm. Taking its inspiration from numerous cultures and mythology, including that of China and Japan, the series has often frustrated fans due to the conflicting storylines that conveniently forget key revelations that had appeared in previous games.

While *Mortal Kombat* was the first released game, it actually takes place after the events of *Mortal Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero*, which focuses on the popular ninja's attempts to retrieve a stolen amulet from Quan Chi, who later appears as a playable character in *Mortal Kombat 4*.



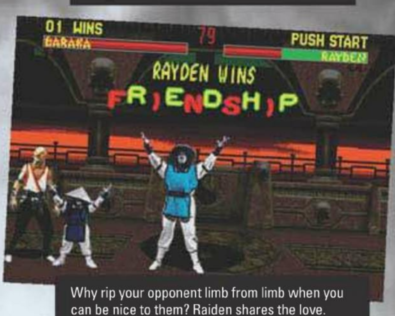
Handheld honors

While popular in the arcades and on home machines, Midway's franchise hasn't exactly fared well on handhelds, with *Mortal Kombat Advance* and *Mortal Kombat Tournament Edition* on the GBA being so bad that they deserve their own boxout. *Mortal Kombat Advance* was a handheld port of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* that had been greatly pared down and suffered from a lack of buttons, while *Tournament Edition* was a rather poor port of *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* that messily married 2D sprites with 3D gameplay.

Fortunately, it's not all bad news for the handheld scene, as the PSP's *Mortal Kombat: Unchained* is a surprisingly polished effort and is only let down by the PSP's own D-pad. Then there's *Ultimate Mortal Kombat* for Nintendo's DS: yet another adaptation of *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, only this time boasting wireless play and the popular mini-game Puzzle Kombat.



Deadly Alliance was the first *Mortal Kombat* game where the characters boasted distinct fighting styles. About bloody time.



Why rip your opponent limb from limb when you can be nice to them? Raiden shares the love.

> All of a sudden Mortal Kombat was starting to look a little tired, and for many followers it never recovered

1999, but Tobias, dissatisfied with life at Midway, left the same year and went on to form Studio Gigante along with several other key members of the *Mortal Kombat* team. The hastily finished spin-off *Special Forces* was a complete flop and Boon was left to pick up the pieces. His answer came three years later in the form of *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* – at that point in time, the series' most ambitious offering.

Appearing five years after *Mortal Kombat 4*, *Deadly Alliance* started to make in-roads in correcting many of the annoyances that had appeared in previous games. Aesthetically, the game was much improved over the last arcade game and featured greatly enhanced character models, far more fluid animation and greater freedom of movement in the 3D playing areas. Eleven new characters, ranging from the blind Kenshi to the unlockable vampire Nitara, bolstered the total roster (once everything had been unlocked) to 23 and popular stalwarts Raiden, Sub-Zero, Scorpion, Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade were all present and correct.

Gameplay had also been markedly improved, with many of the characters featuring two unique fighting styles to switch between at the touch of a button. If that wasn't enough, they also had a weapon that could be employed for further damage. Granted, special moves and Fatalities for each character had been reduced in number – and Babalities, Friendships and Animalities were nowhere to be seen – but this was easily the most comprehensive *Mortal Kombat* that Boon and the rest of the team had put together. And with bonuses like the all-new Konquest mode and the Krypt (essentially a shop for unlocking characters and other items), Boon made sure that there was plenty for everyone.

With favourable reviews from the press and brisk sales, *Mortal Kombat*, while still behind the likes of *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter* and even Tecmo's *Dead Or Alive*, was back on track and fans were eager to see what Boon had up his bloody sleeves for the next instalment.

Mortal Kombat: Deception built on the blocks of *Deadly Alliance* and, like *Mortal Kombat II* had done 11 years earlier, offered even more for fans to get to grips with. The roster now featured a grand total of 24 fighters (26 in the GameCube version). Each character now had two Fatalities and they could even commit hara-kiri on themselves. Gameplay had also been greatly refined and now featured more interactive objects to slam your opponents into, far more fluid character movement and more balanced fighting styles, meaning that it was far more beneficial to switch between styles than it had been in *Deadly Alliance*. However, while plenty of attention had gone on refining the fighting mechanics, the gap between *Mortal Kombat* and its rivals was widening and while there was no denying that the series still remained great fun to play, it lacked the intricacy and sheer depth of many of its peers.

Still, what *Deception* lacked in skill it made up for in sheer variety thanks to its greatly enhanced Konquest mode: far more accessible and enjoyable to play than its predecessor and offering over 20 hours of gameplay. Other notable additions included the superb Chess Kombat (which saw captured pieces taking part in miniature fights) and Puzzle Kombat, an unashamed rip-off of Capcom's sublime *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. Boon wasn't finished, though, and included a greatly expanded Krypt that now featured nearly 700 unlockable items, ranging from additional outfits to a full-length soundtrack. There was also the option to play online, although only for PlayStation 2 and Xbox owners. Arcade-adventure spin-off *Shaolin Monks* appeared a year later, but Boon knew that he needed a title that was bigger, bolder and better than everything that had come before it. Basically he needed an *Armageddon*.

Released on Nintendo's Wii, *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* was the biggest *Mortal Kombat* yet. It was never going to convince non-fans that the series is able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the likes of *Virtua Fighter* and *Soul Calibur*, but there's no denying that if you're looking for simple mindless fun, *Armageddon* has all bases covered. While the PlayStation 2 and Xbox versions featured an amazing 62 characters that were playable from the very start, the Wii version goes one better and adds in Khameleon, who had originally appeared in the N64 version of *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*. Although it does lack online play, what sets the Wii version apart from its older console counterparts is the fact that the game has now been built around the machine's unique control system (although it's still possible to play with a GameCube or Classic Controller for that authentic *Mortal Kombat* experience).

"We began working on the control scheme for the Wii from the beginning of its development", says Boon. "It was something that was in a constant state of refinement and the simpler we made the controls, the more fun people had."

Indeed, such is the simplicity of *Armageddon* that many of the game's special moves can be pulled off with a quick flick of the wrist and other simple hand gestures, meaning that even the most inept of players will be able to pull off *Armageddon*'s spectacular-looking finishing moves. But how does Nintendo feel about the control being used for such gruesome actions, especially after the recent banning of Rockstar's *Manhunt 2*?

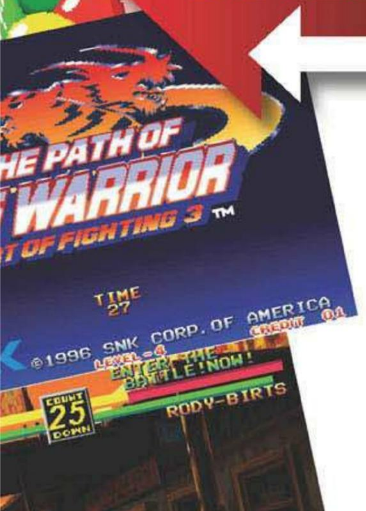
"I can't speak for Nintendo personally", says Boon, "but my understanding is that they would like to have all kinds of games available for the Wii, not just those for kids."

It may have gone through the wringer several times over the last 25 years, but it would appear that Midway's famous franchise isn't going to be disappearing any time soon, and Boon puts this down to the team never being afraid to take risks.

"I think the main reason we've managed to sell big numbers thus far has been because we are not afraid to make dramatic changes to *Mortal Kombat*", he comments. "There has been a number of fighting games that are selling far fewer copies because they are essentially the same game they were ten years ago but with prettier graphics. The average player just thinks, 'been there, done that'. *Mortal Kombat: Armageddon* plays nothing like *MK II*, which plays nothing like *Ultimate MK3*. If all those games played the same, we would have fallen into obscurity like some of our competition has."



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



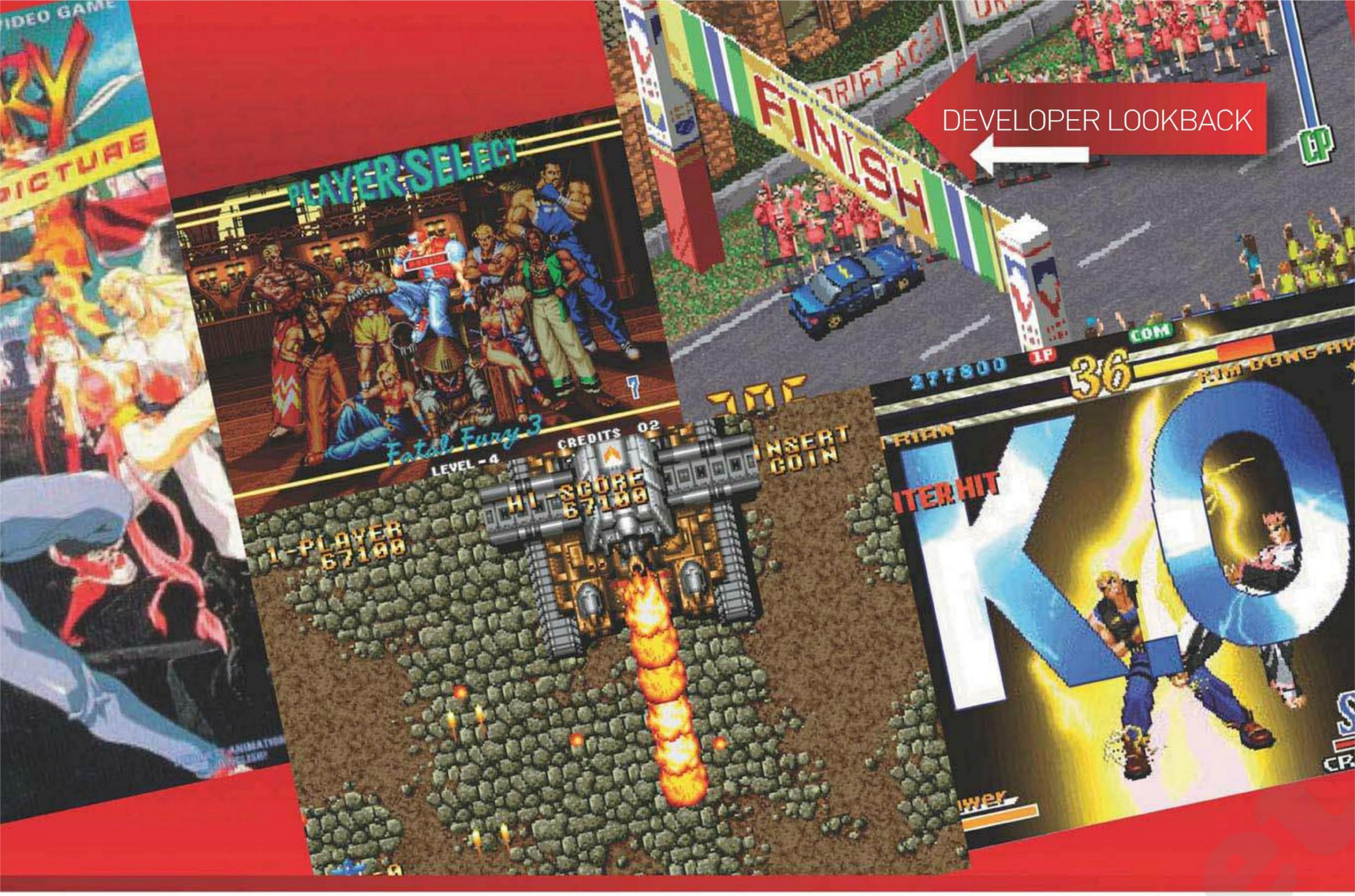
SNK (PART THREE)

FROM THE HEADY DAYS OF EARLY EIGHTIES GAME DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TO THE TENTATIVE CULTURES OF VIDEOGAMES IN THE MID-NINETIES, SNK LEFT A TRAIL THAT WAS BLAZED FROM HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE INNOVATION. MIKE TOOLEY CHARTS THE FINAL CHAPTER OF SHIN NIHON KIKAKU…

The well-publicised demise of SNK shook gaming to the core, coming at the same time that Sega announced it was leaving Dreamcast production. Gamers felt bewildered at the loss and feared that once gaming had fallen into the hands of the behemoths, it would suffer and eventually perish. Corporations that were all muscle and franchise would be all that was left. Gamers cited Sony and Electronic Arts as the villains of the piece, but the truth was gamers only had themselves to blame… themselves and two overambitious Japanese companies.

To fully understand SNK's demise, we need to look back to 1996, as decisions made here would shape an unsustainable future for the Osaka firm. In 1996 gaming went through a major change: 3D grew up. Gone were the slow frame rates and poorly constructed visuals of the last generation; at last 3D was living up to its promise. More so it was the form of choice for all genres of games. While early glimpses of Lara and *Super Mario 64* showed games that were just around the corner, Capcom's *Biohazard* was readied for release, 3D driving and fighting games were all the rage in the arcades, and *Quake* and *Duke Nukem 3D* were redefining adventure and shooting games on the PC. 3D, it seemed, could do no wrong. SNK would deliver more quality releases this year than ever before, but despite this, it seemed the audience was not listening, with *Metal Slug* being a good case in point.

Not only did SNK buy *Metal Slug*, Kawasaki was so enamoured with the game that he bought Nazca in order to secure the sequels and to bring Tomohiro and Yokota into the SNK fold. Both would have a significant and telling part to play in SNK's game output over the coming years, most notably the *Metal Slug* and *King Of Fighters* franchises. The problem with *Metal Slug* wasn't the quality of the game; it



just didn't really work as a financial proposition. It would be three years before SNK would make any profit from the *Metal Slug* series. At the arcade the game was popular, but popular wasn't what it had been a few years ago, so operators made up for low attendances with high pay-to-play premiums on the very latest titles. Gamers wanted an experience what they couldn't have at home, so while somebody would be willing to pay $1 for a credit on *Sega Rally* or *Time Crisis* with their unique cabinets, they were loath to pay half that for a turn on *Metal Slug* in standalone form.

SNK needed to supplement this income through home versions. The AES version (covered last issue) was a disaster, with demand outstripping supply. Despite this, the in-house-developed PlayStation and Saturn releases would achieve moderate but steady success. It wasn't enough, though, from an arcade parent and four subsequent home versions in a two-year period. *Metal Slug* had fallen short of *Fatal Fury* by almost half – not in sales, but in profit. Having to deliver games to so many formats to achieve the same sales base as one or two formats would continue to prove costly.

Worse still, AES software sales had all but stopped outside of Japan. Gamers weren't keen to use a complicated ordering system or pay high import prices. Frustrated, gamers turned to systems with regional support. When *Kizuna Encounter* sold a mere 12 copies in Europe and North America and *Super Sidekicks 4* failed even to attain double figures, SNK stopped production entirely. A few releases would slip out before the end of 1996 – such as Sunsoft's *Waku Waku 7* and ADK's *Twinkle Star Sprites* – but these would slip into obscurity weeks after release, as gamers just didn't know about them or how to get them. The AES was all but over.

Not for the first time, Kawasaki would look to galvanise SNK in the arcades. Responding positively, he commissioned the development of the Hyper Neo Geo 64, bringing to SNK a much needed 3D outlet. Released in 1997, it fell far short of expectation, though. *Samurai Shodown 64* was released as a flagship title but paled in comparison to *Tekken 3* and *Virtua Fighter 3*. It was obvious to gamers that SNK was just cutting its teeth with 3D and that the system was underpowered compared with the Model 3 and System 22 boards of Sega and Namco respectively. The aforementioned looked liked the old masters, while SNK looked a generation behind even in the 3D arena. Arcade revenues were low and a cycle of expensive-to-develop home versions would ensue to try to recoup the costs. Worse, arcade operators were not taking up Neo Geo 64: despite being cartridge-based like the MVS, each genre of the games required an individually tailored cabinet. Prohibitive costs and low returns for Hyper Neo Geo 64 hardware and software assured a short life span for the system and, with just seven games released over an 18-month period, Hyper Neo Geo 64 disappeared entirely.

A more successful addition to the SNK inventory in 1997 was the Neo Print machine, a natural progression of the photo booths that had adorned arcades since their inception, providing users with the ability to add colourful frames and backgrounds to their pictures. Many of these machines can still be found the world over in resorts and arcades.

By now Kawasaki had realised that in order to progress SNK, it couldn't rely on arcade revenues. Cash-starved through reduced income streams from the arcades and its home consoles, SNK didn't have the funds to gamble on pursuing the 3D dream further than the Hyper Neo Geo 64. If the home and arcade markets were not going to be receptive to the quality 2D games SNK was producing, he would find a suitable market elsewhere. Kawasaki looked to the ever-buoyant handheld gaming market. This, he decided, would

COURT OUT

SNK thrived throughout the Eighties and into the Nineties, where it funnelled its creative talents from the whole of the gaming market into a smaller but more vibrant range of games. Somehow through this it managed to avoid much of the litigation that hamstrung the industry through these decades, and went on to register many patents that would secure Playmore additional income streams when technology would eventually catch up. Multi-cartridge arcade cabinets are patented to SNK, as is the ability to use memory card saves from the home in arcade cabinets, to name but two.

Between 1990 and 1994 some of the most high-profile court cases would see Nintendo square off against Sony and Capcom, and Sega fighting Acclaim while Codemasters and Atari were up for a legal fracas with just about everybody, the list goes on, of course, but why is this relevant to SNK? In 1993, Capcom would sue Data East who, at the time, was headed by the ever-embattled Paul Jacobs. The case centred around Data East's *Fighters History*, which it was said infringed Capcom's *Street Fighter* copyright and IP by way of being very similar to play. The game was released in the arcade on MVS hardware and even realised a small AES release. Arriving after *Fatal Fury* and before *Art Of Fighting*, no mention of SNK, the direct competitor to *Street Fighter* and Capcom, was made by either the prosecution or the defence. Data East would go on to lose the case that would prove to be yet another nail in its coffin.



» *Faselei* is one of the Pocket Color's best titles.

» We wonder why Mai is one of SNK's most popular characters?

» Sonic's Neo Geo Pocket outing, while good, wasn't enough to save the console.

» The wonderful *Metal Slug 3* in all its 2D glory



» A Neo Geo Pocket Color cartridge.



» The Neo Geo Pocket Color came in a variety of different colours.

be the perfect outlet for SNK games. As he instructed his hardware teams to develop a handheld system to house SNK IP in Japan, he also took the audacious leap of resurrecting SNK America.

John Barone was brought back into the fold to market residual stocks of Hyper Neo Geo 64 and Neo Print machines to North America, while re-establishing a cost-effective distribution network for gamers still wanting to buy AES carts. Despite there being virtually no market share left, every AES cart sold was almost pure profit; dumped from the MVS version of any new SNK release, the home version would feature only basic packaging. With the title of executive vice president, Barone's first point of business was to install his wife Susan as VP of SNK Consumer Division. Despite the appearance of nepotism, Barone validated this by pointing out that Susan had been the SNK operating officer in the early Nineties. Kawasaki and the Japanese executives looked on bemused but, with an impending hardware release, would consider this situation later.

Nintendo's dominance in the handheld market was and is legendary; Game Boy was synonymous with handheld gaming in the Nineties. Already Nintendo had seen off handheld consoles from the likes of Atari, Sega, Tiger Electronics and NEC, not through superior hardware or games but because it targeted a much younger audience. Kawasaki, as he had with the AES, recognised that there was an older audience out there that was unimpressed with Game Boy and untapped by Nintendo. In September 1998 the Neo Geo Pocket was readied and released in Japan. The portable games system consisted of a D-pad and two fire buttons, and came packaged in a plastic case. Featuring a monochrome screen, it outperformed the Game Boy in all hardware specs, including having almost three times as much battery life.

Neo Geo Pocket sold 10,000 units in its first month at retail and with launch games like *The King Of Fighters R-1, Samurai Shodown* and *Neo Geo Cup 1998* having a huge attach rate, success for the fledgling handheld seemed assured. With initial launch figures superior to Sega's Game Gear, SNK had launched a new console to an established mature market and succeeded. Or would have done had it not been for Nintendo... Within two months of the Pocket being released, Nintendo announced that it would be replacing the Game Boy with the Game Boy Color. Within two months the Neo Geo Pocket had been moved from the must-have list to becoming almost obsolete. Game releases slowed and console sales ground almost to a halt.

With a heavy heart, Kawasaki sent the designers back to the drawing board to develop a colour system. In his mind nothing had changed: if it could repeat the success with a product that had a longer shelf life, SNK would be bolstered and perhaps would find the financial stability to take it forward again and retain its independence.

Interestingly, the Neo Geo Pocket didn't receive a retail release outside of Japan despite SNK America being resurrected, but gamers the world over could order the handheld through the SNK USA website. It was intended that the machine would be marketed as usual with prospective owners purchasing from the website rather than the shops. SNK America did nothing to market the machine and sales showed. Between April and August 1999, just two handhelds were sold through the site. SNK Japan wasn't impressed.

The Japanese board, furious at the lack of sales of Neo Geo Pocket in North America and Europe (at this time the US arm was responsible for all Western markets), demanded a full US release of its successor, the Neo Geo Pocket Color. Orchestrated from Japan, the Barones were tasked daily



» Namco's *Ridge Racer* was a huge hit in the arcades and made SNK's 2D titles look very old.

» As early as 81, SNK was making curios software.

by the Japanese executives unhappy with the decision-making that had seen three system failures outside Japan in a 12-month period. The Barones' freedom of choice and operational control had been removed.

In June 1999, the Neo Geo Pocket Color was released in limited numbers to the US, followed in August by a full retail roll-out. Toys 'R' Us, Electronics Boutique and Wal-Mart all took up the new hardware and gave it prominence in their stores. Within two months the Neo Geo Pocket Color had sold its initial run of 25,000 units. The initial selection of launch games – *Samurai Shodown 2, Fatal Fury First Contact, The King Of Fighters R-2, Pocket Tennis* and *Metal Slug* – all sold through their initial 10,000 copy runs almost instantly. SNK had the machine, the software and the price point, and for once it also had a market. Unfortunately, it also had the Barones. Not believing in the system, they had failed to supply further orders for software to Japan. This effectively meant that early adopters of the Neo Geo Pocket Color in the US couldn't purchase software to use on the system as there just weren't enough games to go around.

The Barones were stripped of all their operational powers just after the launch of the Neo Geo Pocket Color and subsequently released from their contracts at year's end. In their place, Ben Herman would take charge of SNK US operations. A veteran from Jacobs' days at the top, it was Herman who had managed to get Toy 'R' US and Electronics Boutique to take Neo Geo Pocket Color seriously, and much of the launch success was of his making.

By Christmas 1999, SNK looked to have turned a corner, with games arriving thick and fast and bolstered by a deal brokered by Herman to bring Sega's *Sonic The Hedgehog* to the Pocket Color. Herman formulated the biggest SNK advertising campaign seen since the 'Bigger Badder Better' days. $4 million was spent on TV adverts that would feature throughout the Christmas shopping season in the US and Europe. MTV and Comedy Central would play host to the majority of these commercials. Targeting specific demographics the world over, the campaign was hugely successful and delivered SNK back to the world stage. Many of the adverts were shown during shows that were reaching their creative and audience peaks, like *South Park*, *Frasier* and *Different World*. Gone was the consumer apathy of the last few years; SNK was fast becoming established in the handheld arena.

While Herman had managed to borrow Sega's mascot, Kawasaki had signed a four-game deal with Capcom. The first two of these games would make the new release list for Christmas 1999, and their exclusivity would boost sales even further over the following few months. *Capcom vs SNK: Match Of The Millennium*, *SNK vs Capcom: Card Fighters Clash* and *Sonic Pocket Adventure* were all triple-A products and at the time were all only available on the Neo Geo Pocket Color. In the arcades SNK couldn't compete with the 3D powerhouses, and the subsequent conversions of its arcade games performed modestly at best. But in the handheld market it led the hardware field and the software stood head

BLOODY PIRATES!

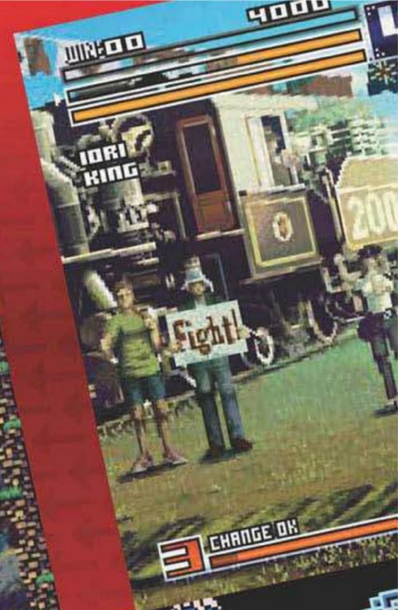
Piracy has held SNK back more than perhaps any other company, with the most notorious example being *SNK vs Capcom Chaos*. Made available for download by pirates before its arcade release, SNK would become embroiled in countless legal battles to stop its software being distributed freely. The problem started back in the early Nineties and came about from gamers wanting to play games in their arcade form without censure.
Because of the furore that surrounded Midway's *Mortal Kombat* and the anti-gaming lobby gaining credence and momentum in the US, SNK Japan censored the US and European release of AES games, most notably *Samurai Shodown*. Desperate to get around this, a group in Mexico developed a chip that allowed MVS cartridges to play on the AES hardware. After SNK Japan decided to supply regional chains, a cottage industry would spring up, allowing gamers to bolster their AES collections through pirated and modded cartridges.

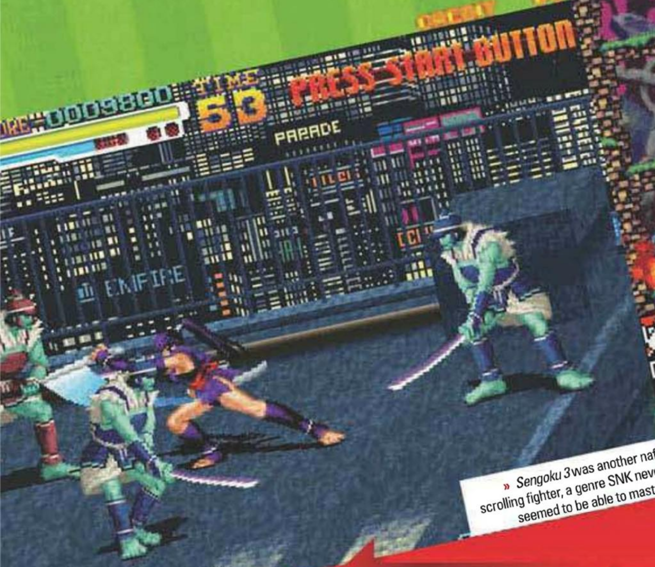
GONE WAS THE CONSUMER APATHY OF THE LAST FEW YEARS; SNK WAS FAST BECOMING ESTABLISHED IN THE HANDHELD ARENA





» SNK vs Capcom: Chaos.





» *Sengoku 3* was another naff scrolling fighter, a genre SNK never seemed to be able to master.











and shoulders above its rivals, despite the comparatively small user base. So successful was this period that SNK had managed to turn a profit outside Japan for the first time in five years. But once again it would prove to be a false dawn for the company.

Cash-starved after so many years of falling revenues, SNK was just existing. Gone was the dynamism that hallmarked its history – SNK was in real trouble. The exciting and prosperous Christmas of 1999, where hope shone so brightly, quickly faded as the new millennium took hold. It hadn't been enough to save SNK.

In January 2000, ownership of SNK and all its companies passed to Aruze, a Pachinko manufacturer. Initially this seemed like a perfect match. SNK needed a capital-rich buyer to move forward, and Aruze certainly matched that criterion. For Aruze, SNK offered very marketable IP for which to develop Pachinko machines. Looking to turn SNK back to profit, Aruze would reduce funding for the SNK development studios. With a lack of funding, releases for home systems suffered delays; without a coherent publishing strategy and little in the way of marketing, SNK was slowing to a stop.

Despite this, Ben Herman attended the E3 show of 2000 with an air of optimism. Neo Geo Pocket Color had amassed a two per cent market share in less than 12 months and on display was possibly the strongest line-up of games that the console had seen. *Faselei!*, *Metal Slug: Second Mission*, *Cotton*, *Evolution*, *Last Blade* and *Dynamite Slugger* were all due for release in the next two months. Furthermore, these games were tailored to the English-speaking market and *Falselei!* looked more like a next-generation game, pushing the hardware to its limits. It even featured MP3-standard music, unheard of at that time. Off the back of this particular E3, Toys 'R' Us would ensure that all its stores would now carry demo pods of the Neo Geo Pocket Color, so convinced was it of its future.

If you looked into SNK at that time, its problems weren't obvious, but for those looking out it was evident that the writing was on the wall.

A mere three weeks after the most successful E3 for SNK since the mid Nineties, Aruze made the following statement to the world press: "In a move to regroup and re-evaluate its worldwide marketing strategy, SNK Entertainment, Inc has decided to cease distribution of Neo Geo Pocket Color hardware and software in the US and Canada, effective immediately. The company will also stop domestic distribution of all Dreamcast and PlayStation titles."

To enforce how much of a bombshell this was to anybody outside of the Aruze central office at that time, in the US all the games that were mentioned at E3 were sat in a warehouse awaiting packaging. All the materials had been purchased a week prior to the announcement, and the games just needed to be assembled into retail form, but SNK was no longer permitted to complete this operation. Instead the boxes and manuals were sold to a recycling firm while the cartridges were returned to Japan for parts.

Too much for him to bear, Kawasaki left rather than watch the company he had built for a quarter of a century stagnate. With other SNK executives behind him, he formed Brezzasoft.

Without Kawasaki and a board to run SNK, Aruze took the step of shutting down all SNK operations outside Japan. Revenues ceased and the ensuing tailspin would see Aruze put SNK into bankruptcy within 12 months. Debts and operating losses of over $260 million, along with an impending court case from investors headed by Kawasaki that would charge Aruze of being wilfully negligent and



» While not as good as the Mega Drive version, this bonus round on the Sonic's Neo Geo Pocket Color adventure was still fun.

» The *Super Side Kicks* games were fun arcade footy titles.

» Mai takes the term "bottoms up" far too literally. Silly girl.

solely responsible for the SNK operating loss, was too much for the Pachinko maker to tolerate.

This bankruptcy gave Kawasaki the chance to buy back some of the SNK IP from liquidators. Most notably, *The King Of Fighters* would go to Brezzasoft which would release a couple of *KOF* games on Sammy's Atomiswave board during the fallout, but Apple Industries would win the rights to North American MVS distribution, and Apple Photo Systems snapped up the SNK photo booth technology .

In August 2001, Kawasaki set up a new company called Playmore, with which he acquired Brezzasoft and set about reclaiming the SNK IP. Continuing the SNK business plans, Playmore would develop games using SNK IP for arcades and home consoles. Playmore would go on to sue Aruze for copyright breaches and receive damages of $58 million, as well as acquiring the old SNK headquarters in Osaka. Two years after its formation, Playmore changed its name to SNK Playmore and SNK was reborn.

Kawasaki puts these years of turmoil into great perspective for us: "After the SNK bankruptcy, SNK IP was taken over by Playmore and many former SNK employees joined with us at that time… SNK Playmore can be considered as a continuation of SNK, utilising the technology and know-how that has been cultured by the development on more than 100 games and IPs, and we're continuously developing more titles. On the other hand, we're challenging a new genre of entertainment machines – Pachi Slot – and building this business up into one of the pillars of our enterprise for the future. We're now trying to be a multi-entertainment company with games and in the Pachi Slot field." He continues, "We have created some new game systems that have innovated fighting games, but it's true that it's not recognised directly by many end-users. We think we have to release triple-A titles in the future. If many gamers play our games with our new game systems, they'll recognise our company name."

THE COMPANY THAT SHOT FOR THE MOON AND MISSED, LANDED SOFTLY

For SNK Playmore the future is assured, albeit at a slower pace. The company that shot for the moon and missed, landed softly. Still trying to gain recognition, SNK perhaps should reflect that unlike others who have contributed so much, it has the distinction of still existing. Taito and Atari, among others, are now just badges; a handful of pioneers still survive and SNK, against all the odds, is one of them.

Anything is possible over the next few years for SNK Playmore. With downloadable content available on all major consoles, it seems SNK will no longer have to build new formats to house its IP, new and old. When asked what's next for the SNK and Capcom alliance, Kawasaki replies with a smile: "*Metal Slug vs Bionic Commando*? If we could have an opportunity, we would like to consider it.".

Despite the rollercoaster that was SNK, Kawasaki cites only one regret for over a quarter of a century in the industry, and it's not Aruze: "It is regrettable to say that *Metal Slug 6* was the final part of the *Metal Slug* franchise, but we would like to develop a new 3D *Metal Slug* game for new generation of hardware in the near future."

Eikichi Kawasaki and SNK, we salute you both.

DOUBLE TAKE

For SNK, everything it seems must happen twice. While sales of *KOF 98* were poor on PSX because gamers were waiting on PS2, the Dreamcast in Japan received *KOF 98* and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* just as Sega's much loved machine went through its final death rolls, contributing to very low sales. After numerous resubmissions to Microsoft, *Metal Slug 3* and various *KOF* titles would eventually arrive on the Xbox some two years after their intended launch dates, but by this time, Microsoft's big black box was all but dead, with gamers migrating to the 360. Sony has relented and many SNK games are now available on the PSP, but nothing with SNK is ever straightforward and a similar thing is now happening on the download services like Xbox Live Arcade and Virtual Console. *Fatal Fury* has been readied but remains in testing for Live Arcade, while SNK Playmore is less than happy with Nintendo's current online strategy. Despite some 24 Neo Geo games being announced for the console, Nintendo's insistence that only first-party software could feature online features during 2007 meant a redesign and another late launch for *Metal Slug Anthology*, and with a bugged release of *Card Fighters* currently available on the DS, Playmore's future looks to carry forward the in the non-linear tradition of the Osaka legend.

Thanks to the lovely Killer List of Videogames for several images.

Before They Were Famous

WE RELISH THE CHANCE TO MAKE INDUSTRY CELEBS CRINGE WITH EMBARRASSMENT. AFTER THE LAST 'BEFORE THEY WERE FAMOUS', THERE WERE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT WILL WRIGHT GOT HOLD OF AN ISSUE AND PROMPTLY RAN FROM A MANHATTAN HOTEL IN NOTHING BUT FLOWING BATHROBES, SCREAMING, "WHERE THE HELL DID YOU GET THAT PHOTO OF ME, YOU BASTARDS?!" (THAT THIS RESULTED IN HIS ARREST IS PURELY SPECULATION.) JOHN SZCZEPANIAK AGAIN DIGS UP THE PAST, INTENT ON EMBARRASSING AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE AND MAKING THEM RUN SCREAMING FROM HOTELS



EARLY GAMES:
Girl's Garden

CLAIM TO FAME:
Sonic The Hedgehog





YUJI NAKA

Yuji Naka learned programming by typing up magazine listings for games. Upon finding errors, he would try to correct them himself and soon began studying Assembler in his free time. "A lot of people draw cartoons in their notebooks during classes, but I was writing code." Later, joining Sega, his very first game was a rather odd title called *Girl's Garden* for the precursor to the Master System. "One of my colleagues and I made it as part of our so-called rookie training. We were trying to find out the limits of expression on the SG-1000. However, all of a sudden, our boss decided to put it on the market so we had to finish it. The game was kind of cute, in which a girl named Papuri had to pick flowers and bring them to this boy named Mint. I wanted girls to play this game."

On how he sees it now, Naka spoke fondly of his first creation. "I feel that a lot of things were considered thoroughly, and the concept in itself is pretty organised for my first game. Though I say it myself, I think it was a pretty good game. We were also fortunate that they turned our ideas into a product." Actually playing it, *Girl's Garden* comes across almost as a bizarre and jerky *Pac-Man* clone, with flowers replacing the pellets, two bears replacing the ghosts, and blue pots of honey as pseudo power pills.

CLAIM TO FAME

Although he worked on other titles, it was the ball of blue spikes that propelled him to international fame. Evaluating it now, Naka admits to being a little biased: "It's a game that has a special place in my heart, so I can't really find any flaws in it. I filled the game with the last drop of my idea, so I was pretty confident about it. I mean, I had this confidence that it would sell well both in the US and in Europe. In fact, it was just as I had imagined."





EARLY GAMES:
Penguin Adventure (MSX)

CLAIM TO FAME:
Metal Gear series





HIDEO KOJIMA

Kojima dreamed of making films, but got into games because he thought they could better satisfy him. He wasn't happy in the early days: "It was really disappointing because they assigned me to the MSX division. I had joined a company in the game industry, wanting to make Famicom or arcade games, and then I was assigned to MSX. Back then MSX had only 16 colours, and on top of that, if you excluded all the colours that were hard to use, such as pink or purple, you were left with only eight colours. I was desperate, wondering how on earth I could make games with that." Regardless, his first game, *Penguin Adventure*, is still hailed as one of the best action titles on the system. It's vastly superior to its predecessor: some holes in the floor contain secret shops, there's a tremendous amount of variety, and there are even bosses. It's a truly excellent title that few seem to discuss.

Despite the praise of his early games, Kojima isn't fond of his older work or the zealous passion of retro fans. He says: "What I like about making games is that they don't survive. You can't play old games as game machines are constantly changing. The Japanese proverb that says 'you discard your shame when you travel' is what games are to me. Games should remain in people's minds and in history. That means that people forget about the games we make, which is good."

CLAIM TO FAME

"The company asked me to create a combat game. Actually, a senior associate had been in charge of it but he was stuck and I was asked to do it. You could not have more than four bullets with MSX, and that meant you could only have two to three enemies. You cannot make a combat game with that. So I came up with a game like *The Great Escape*, where the prisoner had to escape. It was an idea born from adverse situations."





EARLY GAMES: *Game Freak* (self-published fanzine), *Quinty* (aka *Mendel Palace*)

CLAIM TO FAME: *Pocket Monsters*





SATOSHI TAJIRI

Tajiri wrote for fanzine *Game Freak* before turning to homebrew development. "It became possible to see what was going on inside the Famicom when software for beginners called Family BASIC was released. When I understood its mechanism, I went to Akihabara to buy a multi-use circuit board, added the terminals from my Famicom, and ran my programs over it. That was our first step." *Quinty* was published three years later.

Now he says: "It was punk. At that time Famicom games had restrictions based on hardware. I just wanted to go against the flow of time, and it was also a very stoic manner of trying to show them the kind of games we thought were fun." He says most games only had two frames of animation: "I couldn't forgive this type of animation that looked like a cheap picture-story." His focus was on quality movements rather than flashy colours. "There weren't games with such a concept. That is why I say it was punk." The game is hugely fun even when emulated today, and Tajiri was right: the animation is painstakingly fluid.

CLAIM TO FAME

Pokémon. He wanted to release *Quinty* in America but it was rejected for being too cute (despite later being published by Namco as *Mendel Palace*). "I started to ask myself what I really wanted to make. That became the roots of *Pokémon*. Thinking about 'who I was' brought me back [to my youth]. I wanted to create a game with all my memories, and that was the birth of *Pokémon*."





EARLY GAMES: *Detana!! Twinbee, Tokimeki Memorial*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*





KOJI IGARASHI

Igarashi, or IGA, plays by his own rules. He told Gamasutra: "I joined Konami right after I graduated from college. I was going to enter a different company, but at the last minute I had a quarrel with the human resources department, and was fired before I even began. But I had a mentor at Konami, who really thought I should work there. I passed their application exam but I didn't have enough university credits to work there full-time, so I had to stay on for another year of school, working at Konami in a part-time capacity. After that, I became a full-time Konami employee. This was in the year Heisei 2, or 1990."

His first project was never completed: "I entered Konami as a programmer, and worked on a simulation game under the education software department, that was never released. My first real product that came to market was *Detana!! Twinbee* for the PC Engine." He later also worked on the successful *Tokimeki Memorial*. There's no direct correlation between these and his famous works, but everyone starts somewhere (did you know Jackie Chan starred in a softcore porno film?). IGA speaks nostalgically of these early days, saying to Next-Gen.biz: "Back in the good old days, we had smaller teams making games, so it was far less complex."

CLAIM TO FAME

Symphony Of The Night is arguably IGA's greatest achievement. "*Castlevania* was a series I enjoyed before I started at Konami, so I'm really gratified that this series has been entrusted to me. As for how I took over the project: I was working on *Tokimeki Memorial*, and told my boss that I wouldn't work on a sequel. Because the game was selling well at the time, my boss accepted my request for transfer. I asked to move to the *Castlevania* team."





EARLY GAMES: *Bomb Buenos Aires, Rox, Headbanger's Heaven, Andes Attack*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*





YAK

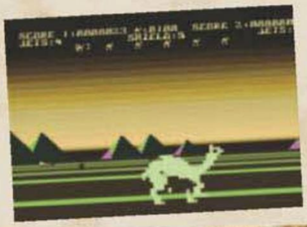
Even before he was famous, the Yak courted controversy. His account, on Llamasoft.com, is very revealing: "If we were to call ourselves Llamasoft, we actually needed some software to sell, and so during the summer of 1982 I busied myself with the creation of what were to be the first Llamasoft games for the VIC-20. One of them was a simple 3D maze game with redefined characters that put bricks on the maze walls along with occasional Pink Floyd hammers and the Llamasoft logo. Another was probably the most shameful thing in Llamasoft history, a joke that got out of hand."

This was a clone of *City Bomber*, though as the Yak reveals, it was no ordinary clone: "At the time, there was conflict between Argentina and Britain over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and – just for a joke, you see – I created a little graphic of a waving Argentinian flag and stuck that on top of the buildings in my city. And made the VIC play *Rule Britannia* when the plane landed successfully. And called the game *Bomb Buenos Aires*. It was all done in what was intended as a tongue-in-cheek manner. I thought that it might get us noticed – in a tasteless kind of a way – and indeed it did."

The Daily Telegraph asked who wanted to release "thousands of tons of bombs on Buenos Aires." The Press Complaints Commission stepped in, and Llamasoft issued an apology and changed the title.

CLAIM TO FAME

Some may have expected to see *Tempest 2000* here, but the Yakmeister achieved fame early in his career. *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* was an interesting shoot-'em-up, in which you had to obliterate endless waves of giant, attacking mutant camels. For our American readers, it's worth noting that the *Gridrunner* sequel, called *Matrix*, was for some reason renamed *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* in the US.



Before They Were Famous



EARLY GAMES:
Address Book, *Star Trek* hack, fortune-telling program, *Tennis*, *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken*

CLAIM TO FAME:
Dragon Quest series





YUJI HORII

Asking about Horii's first proper game reveals he created Japan's earliest adventure/RPG-style title. "I read an article in a PC magazine about a US genre called 'adventure games', which allowed players to read stories on their PCs. We still didn't have them in Japan, and I took it upon myself to make one. That was how *Portopia Renzoku Satsujin Jiken* came about. It was a program in which the story would develop through entering a command and by receiving an answer to it. It was exciting for me to imagine the reactions of the players playing with it." It's been described by the Japanese press as "a game without game over", since there was technically no way to lose.

Starting on the PC-88, it was ported to multiple systems, including MSX and Famicom, but never made it out of Japan. Thanks to ROM-hacking group DvD Translations, the Famicom version can now be patched and enjoyed in English. Although simple, it shows its skill in the pacing, general flow of the investigation, and the writing (based on the fan translation, which is reportedly accurate).

CLAIM TO FAME

Portopia's console success led Horii to create *Dragon Quest*, which influenced Square and thereby the entire industry. So, having been involved with all the *Dragon Quest* games, which is his favourite? "It's a tough question; I have a special feeling for each of them. You had to shift between reality and dreams in *VI* – although some thought that the story was confusing, this is actually my personal favourite."





EARLY GAMES:
Super Billiards, *Roller Ball*, *Hole In One Professional*, *Space Defence Force*, *Arcana*

CLAIM TO FAME: Nintendo presidency, Wii launch





SATORU IWATA

Satoru Iwata, the current president of Nintendo, started off as a game programmer – even doing it freelance during university for HAL Laboratories. After graduating, he was hired full-time by HAL. A quick check shows that he's credited in several games as co-creator or programmer, like *Super Billiards* and *Hole In One Professional*, while for others like *Roller Ball*, *Space Defence Force* (NES), and *Arcana* (SNES) he's listed only as a technical advisor. Regardless, his direct contribution is without question.

It's interesting to note that despite his senior managerial position, he's actually a skilled and competent coder – it's in stark contrast to other companies where senior people were trained in business practices while having no understanding of the game creation process. He became president of HAL Laboratories in 1993, after which he was credited in every title the company made. He continued to directly work on several games – notably the *Kirby* series, which he helped envision. Even today Iwata is said to aid in the creation of new *Kirby* titles.

CLAIM TO FAME

It's difficult to pinpoint precisely what Iwata's claim to fame should be since he's always had a presence. However, there's no denying the gravitas of his appointment as president of Nintendo in 2002 – the first to take up the role without being related to a Yamauchi through blood or marriage. And, of course, he then ushered in the Wii console. From humble origins, Satoru Iwata gradually rose to great power.





EARLY GAMES: Co-founded Square, *3D WorldRunner*, *Rad Racer*, *JJ*

CLAIM TO FAME:
Final Fantasy series





HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI

The original Square was co-founded by Sakaguchi in September 1983, along with Masafumi Miyamoto, though it wouldn't become independent of parent company Denyuusha until 1986. In its early days, Square developed a lot of garbage such as *Genesis: Beyond The Revelation* and *Cruise Chaser Blassty* on NEC PC-88. The company even developed hentai. Googling for Square's PC-88 title *Alpha* during office hours is not recommended.

Sakaguchi was responsible for some of the firm's better titles. Three of his earliest games include *3D WorldRunner*, *Rad Racer* and *JJ* – all for NES. Although not noticeable from these screenshots, *WorldRunner* and *JJ* are highly impressive 3D NES titles that mimic *Space Harrier*. They were also compatible with the system's 3D goggles. *Rad Racer* was developed between these two, and for the time was a good racer again compatible with the goggles. *Rad Racer* was also made famous by the Nintendo World Championship and the Fred Savage film *The Wizard*, where it was controlled by the Power Glove. Who knew at the time that the man behind these would take over the RPG world?

CLAIM TO FAME

Regarding Japanese RPGs, Sakaguchi is second only to Yuji Horii. Although the creator of *Final Fantasy* was less involved after *VI*, there's no denying that the series exists because of Sakaguchi. He told *Famitsu*: "In the beginning, I was the main planner, but when the production team increased, a director was needed so I took that role as well. Basically, I was responsible for the story and events – in other words, the tale up to *FF VI*."





EARLY GAMES: *Capcom Quiz Hatena's Adventure, Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Goof Troop, Aladdin*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Resi Evil, DMC, Phoenix Wright*





SHINJI MIKAMI

The history of Shinji Mikami is best accounted by the man himself in the book *Another Side Of Biohazard*. Roughly translated, he said on his days before *RE*: "After I started work at Capcom, I made a game for the Game Boy, a quiz-adventure. My boss told me to, 'Make it in one month', but it took about three months to finish.

"My second game, *Roger Rabbit*, only sold overseas so I didn't get much respect within Capcom because the game didn't sell in Japan. I had to create everything by myself. It took five months.

"Next was a Formula One game. I really love racing so I was excited to make it, but it got cancelled about eight months later. That was my mistake: I wanted quality. I put a lot of pressure on the staff, who said: 'We can't do it any more.' I said: 'If you can't do this I'll cancel the whole project', and it really got cancelled. I paid for that mistake; my next job was a port from an arcade game and I had only three months to do it because I had to finish quickly for the company to get its money back.

"Afterwards it was Disney again, with *Goof Troop*. After *Goofy* was *Aladdin*, another Disney game. I made three Disney games and then finally *Resident Evil*. I think I appreciate Disney because my frustration gathered to create *Resident Evil*."

CLAIM TO FAME

"Mr Fujiwara called me one day and told me to make a horror game. And he wanted to use the system from the game *Sweet Home*. He told me to create 'something worth seeing.' When he said that, I thought 'finally, my moment has come.' In *RE*, even though the game system is the same as *Sweet Home*, there are few similarities, but I got a lot of ideas from it. *Sweet Home* didn't sell well, but I still think that game was the masterpiece."





EARLY GAMES: Automaton puppets (not a game), *Mario Open Golf, Marvelous: Mouhitotsu no Takarajima*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Zelda* series from *Ocarina Of Time*





EIJI AONUMA

Aonuma on his early years: "I had a chance interview with Nintendo. I'd played arcade games on occasion so knew what videogames were. I went to the interview where I met with Shigeru Miyamoto. I showed him the automatons I'd created for my graduate work and got the job. Long after I joined Nintendo, I found out Miyamoto is a huge fan of puppetry.

"In the beginning, I did graphic design, drawing dot-pictures for sprite-based games. I discovered that all the art I created over my first year – I drew the characters for *Mario Open Golf* on Famicom – finally went into a small stone-like thing: a cartridge ROM. I've always been very sensitive to the tactile sense in my creative world, so that was a culture shock for me. But I continued at Nintendo, deciding to give myself time to experience game development. Luckily, I was put in charge of directing the development of *Marvelous*, a SNES game released in Japan, which turned out to be a great experience." He believes it was Marvelous that led to his move to the *Zelda* team: "Perhaps Mr Miyamoto thought that my vision – creating a multiplicity of small things to create an enormous thing, which I'd done during *Marvelous* – would be a perfect fit for *Zelda*."

CLAIM TO FAME

He started with *Ocarina Of Time*, which is still his favourite. "I think that *Ocarina Of Time* was the most impressive title for me. My favourite bit was probably the Water Shrine. I love diving in the sea, and I thought I put plenty of diving puzzles in it. This made it a bit more difficult than most of the game, but it's the bit that remains strongly in my mind." And Aonuma's views on his cel-shaded version of Link? "I like Link in that shape and I have no desire to stop producing games with cel-shaded Link."





EARLY GAMES: *Spitfire Ace, Solo Flight, Silent Service, Crusade In Europe,*

CLAIM TO FAME: *Sid Meier's Pirates!*





SID MEIER

Meier began his career around 1982, and started off mainly creating flight sims like *Spitfire Ace* and *F-15 Strike Eagle*, before moving onto strategic military war games. He's spoken openly in past interviews regarding these early days: "It was still a time when a couple of guys in a basement could duplicate their own disks, put them in plastic baggies with a four-page photocopied manual, and actually sell a product like that. It was a great learning experience. I think a lot of what makes me kind of able to keep doing games is the fact that I was there at the beginning and that I don't have to play catch-up all the time. It's kind of like I've been there since the start, so I've seen the evolution of the industry and have a bit of a sense of history and perspective."

He also spoke about MicroProse, the company he co-founded with Bill Stealy: "We started off with, basically, me writing the games, and I had a couple of my friends doing conversions – we all had day jobs; this was kind of our hobby." While he was undeniably successful during his early years, building a strong reputation within the industry with several games being highly acclaimed, it can be argued that he only truly became famous once his name started appearing in titles.

CLAIM TO FAME

Meier explains *Pirates!*: "It was basically my reaction to the adventure/RPG games that I'd played. I thought 'this is the way I'd like to see an adventure game done.' Forget the points, the mathematics – just have an adventure. Go do things and wander around this world." *Pirates!* was ported and updated for multiple computers and consoles, later being redone for PC, Xbox and PSP, which you can take a look at below.





EXCITEBIKE

BIKES... THAT EXCITE



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** RACER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** NES
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5+, 500 POINTS FOR WII VERSION

HISTORY

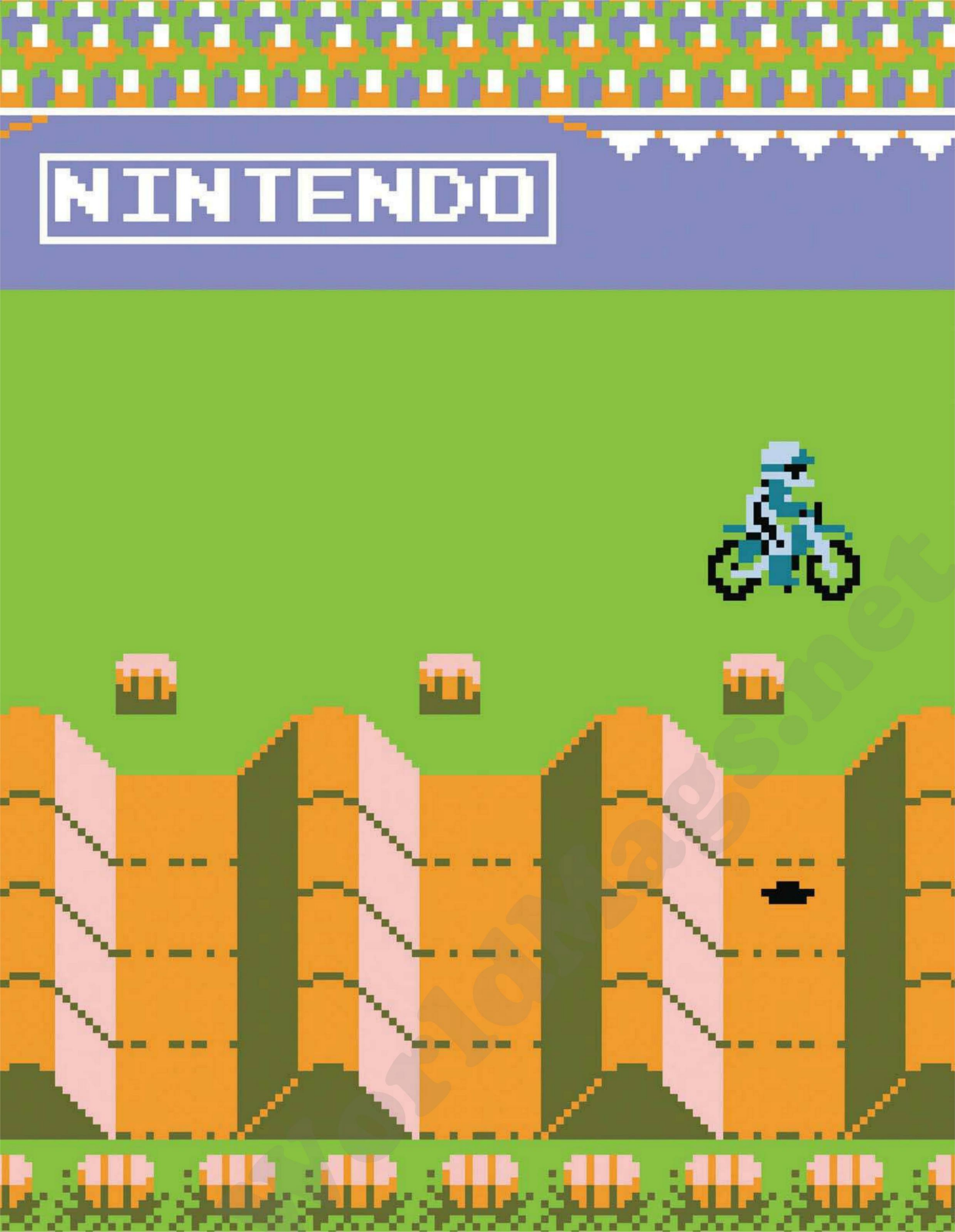


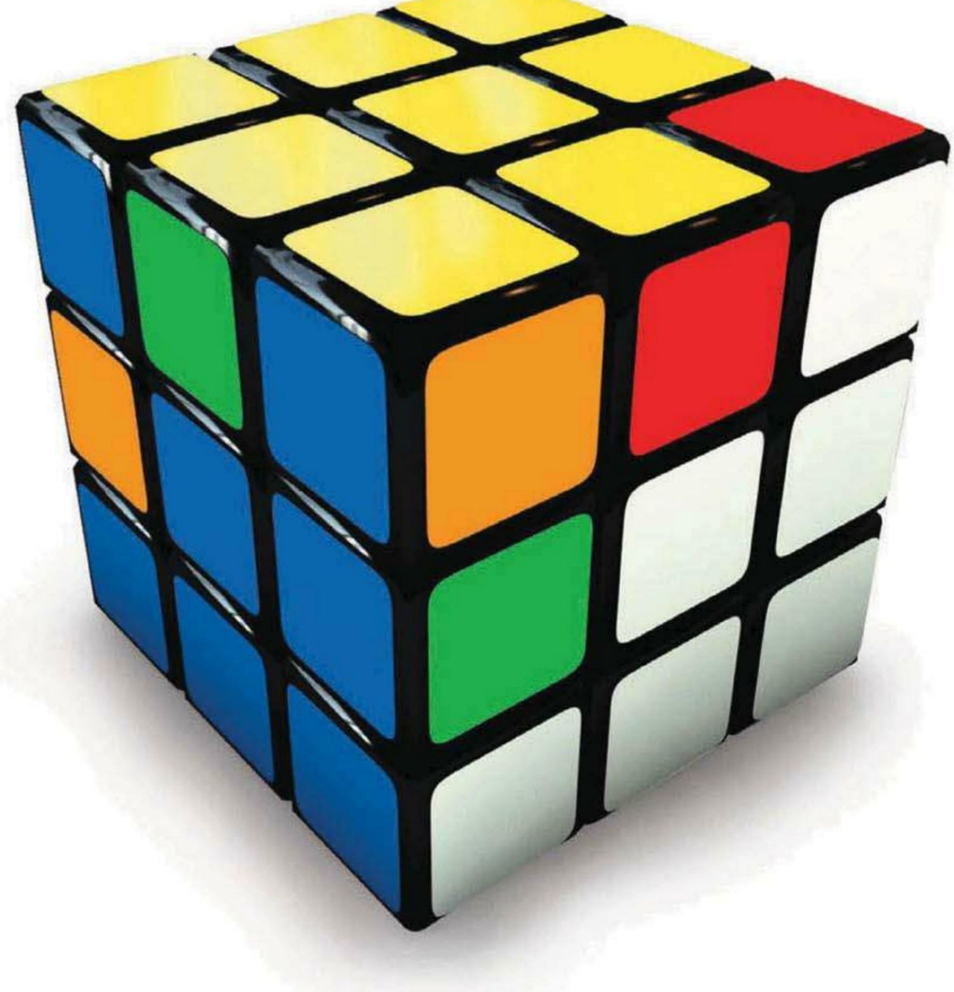
You've got to hand it to Shigeru Miyamoto, he certainly knows how to make great games. Take the brilliant *Excitebike*, for example. It doesn't look too special with its just about functional backgrounds, teeny weeny (yet rather cute) motorbike sprites and the sort of sound effects that will cause your ears to shut down in protest, but if you look deeper you'll find that beneath the rudimentary aesthetics lies that typical Midas, sorry, Miyamoto touch.

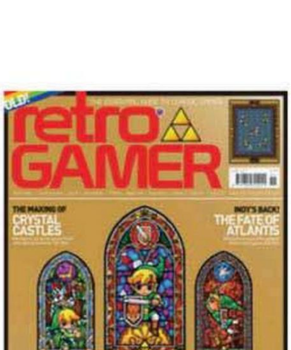
A simple time attack trial at its pulsing heart, *Excitebike* requires you to do nothing more than race through a selection of cleverly designed courses as quickly as possible. Sure, you'll have to occasionally keep an eye on your temperature gauge to make sure your bike doesn't overheat, but that's about as complicated as *Excitebike* gets.

While the single-player time trials are pretty good fun – 21 years on and I'm still returning to them thanks to the Virtual Console release – it's racing against the three computer opponents that really helps to elevate Nintendo's racer above similar games of the time. Beautifully paced, your three competitors are initially fairly easy to beat, but as the levels progress you have a real fight on your hands if you want to walk away with first place.

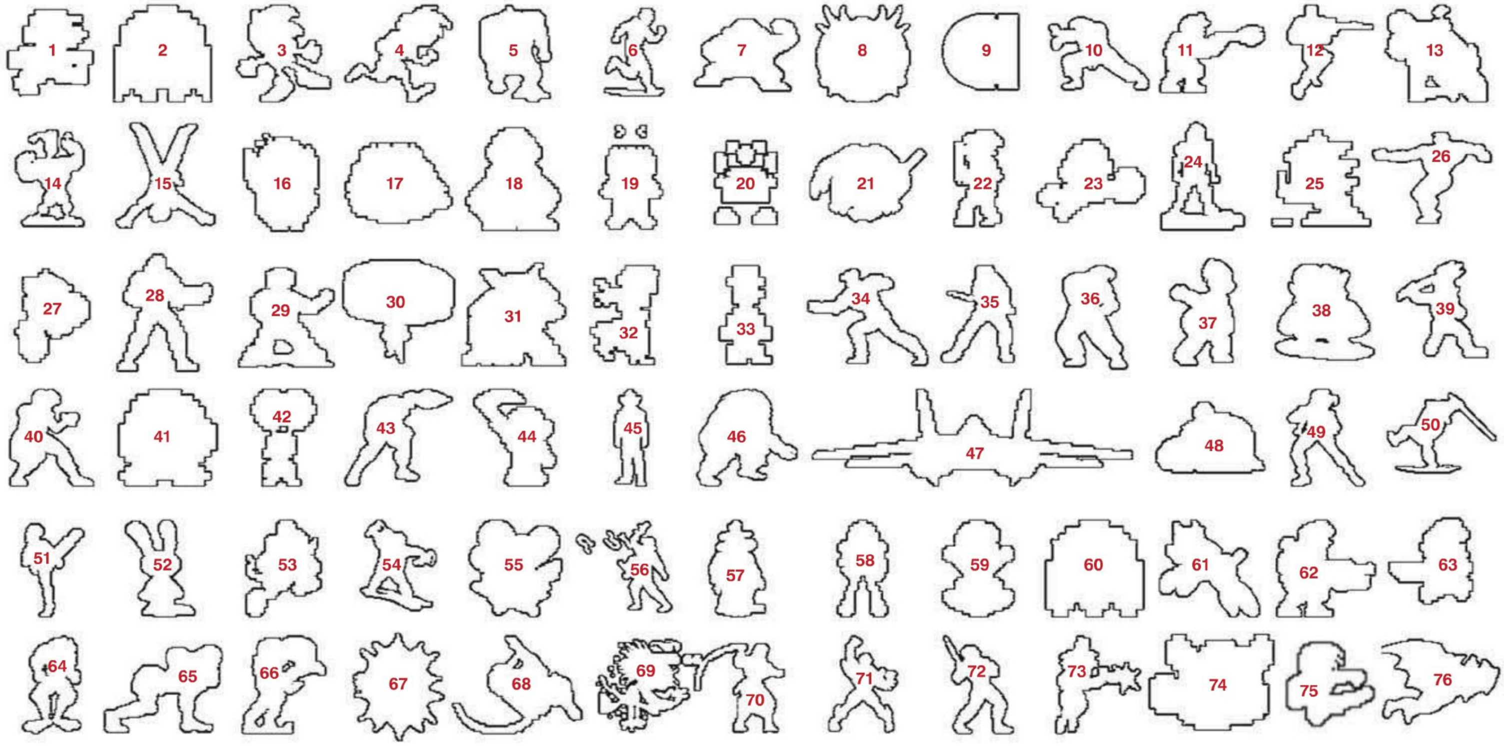
When you've finally exhausted the single-player time trials and have become bored with constantly beating the computer's AI, *Excitebike* has one more trick up its sleeve: a sublime edit mode. While you'll initially spend all your time devising the sort of devious ramps and jumps that even Evel Knievel would think long and hard about jumping across, you'll soon take it all seriously and begin to create courses that really test your mettle. And that's the beauty of *Excitebike*: the more put into Nintendo's superb little racer, the more you'll continue to get out of it. And if that's not the sign of a good game, I don't know what is.


NINTENDO





retro GAMER
THE MAKING OF CRYSTAL CASTLES
INDY'S BACK! THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
The history of ZELDA
Come worship at the temple of Hyrule's greatest hero



1 – Mario - Super Mario Bros.
2 – Inky – Pac-Man
3 – Sonic – Sonic The Hedgehog
4 – Gunstar Red – Gunstar Heroes
5 – Demon – DOOM
6 – Nick - Combat School
7 – Donkey Kong – Donkey Kong
8 – Cacodemon - DOOM
9 – Bullet Bill – Super Mario World
10 – Ryu – Super Street Fighter II: The World Warrior
11 – Marco – Metal Slug
12 – RoboCop – RoboCop
13 – Player 1 – Road Rash
14 – Jim – Earthworm Jim
15 – Strider Hiryu – Strider
16 – Tiki – The New Zealand Story
17 – Skweek – Super Skweek
18 – Monkey Marco – Metal Slug 4
19 – Wonder Boy – Wonder Boy in Monsterland
20 – Toad – Wario's Woods
21 – Ganon – The Legend Of Zelda: A Link to the Past
22 – Link – Zelda II: Link's Awakening
23 – Baby Mario – Mario Tennis
24 – Barbarian – Barbarian The Ultimate Warrior
25 – Bob – Bubble Bobble
26 – Haggar – Final Fight
27 – Player 1 – Excite Bike
28 – Lance – Contra III: Alien Spirits
29 – Red Player – IK+
30 – Solid Snake – Metal Gear Solid: Ghost Babel
31 – Ganon – The Legend Of Zelda
32 – Pauline – Donkey Kong
33 – Willy – Jet Set Willy
34 – Axel – Streets Of Rage
35 – Tyris Flare – Golden Axe
36 – Ken Masters – Street Fighter II: The World Warrior
37 – Homer Simpsons – The Simpsons Arcade Game
38 – Wario – Wario's Woods
39 – Gilius Thunderhead – Golden Axe
40 – Chun-Li – Street Fighter II: The World Warrior
41 – Kirby – Kirby's Great Adventure
42 – Balloon Kid – Balloon Fight
43 – Cyclops – X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse
44 – Player 1 – Harvest Moon
45 – Indiana Jones – Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis
46 – Blanka – Street Fighter II: The World Warrior
47 – F-14 Eagle – After Burner II
48 – White Bomberman – Super Bomberman
49 – Cammy – Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers
50 – Donatello – Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
51 – Billy Lee – Double Dragon
52 – Sam – Sam & Max Hit The Road
53 – Mickey Mouse – Castle Of Illusion
54 – Michelangelo – Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
55 – Pikachu – Pokémon Yellow
56 – Raiden – Mortal Kombat
57 – Max – Sam & Max Hit The Road
58 – Samus Arun – Metroid
59 – Randi – The Secret Of Mana
60 – Clyde – Pac-Man
61 – Rush – Mega Man 7
62 – Tarma – Metal Slug
63 – Luigi – Super Mario World
64 – Rash – Battletoads
65 – Dhalsim – Street Fighter II: The World Warrior
66 – Space Pirate – Super Metroid
67 – Protoman – Mega Man 7
68 – Diddy Kong – Donkey Kong Country
69 – Chester Cheetah – Chester Cheetah: Wild, Wild Quest
70 – Richter Belmont – Dracula X
71 – Sketch Turner – Comix Zone
72 – Ax-Battler – Golden Axe
73 – Gunstar Blue – Gunstar Heroes
74 – Rabite – Secret Of Mana
75 – Guy – Mighty Final Fight
76 – Batman – Batman Returns
77 – Q*Bert – Q*Bert
78 – Fei Long – Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers
79 – Alys – Phantasy Star IV: The End of the Millennium
80 – Super Sonic – Sonic The Hedgehog 2
81 – Link – Link's Awakening
82 – Piranha Plant – Super Mario World
83 – Rick Dangerous – Rick Dangerous
84 – Guybrush Threepwood – The Secret Of Monkey Island
85 – Terry Bogard – Fatal Fury
86 – Bomb Jack – Bomb Jack
87 – Luke Skywalker – Super Star Wars
88 – Vic Viper – Gradius
89 – Players 1 – Track & Field
90 – Mario – Super Mario Kart
91 – Aladdin – Aladdin
92 – Player 1 – Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja
93 – Boogerman – Boogerman
94 – Marty McFly – Back To The Future Part II
95 – Player 1 – Mega Twins
96 – Cool Spot – Cool Spot
97 – Donald Duck – Quackshot
98 – Harrier – Space Harrier II
99 – Kid Chameleon – Kid Chameleon
100 – Kyo Kusaragi – The King Of Fighters '99
101 – Blaze – Streets Of Rage
102 – Captain Commando – Captain Commando
103 – Blocker Lemming – Lemmings
104 – Player 1 – Mercs
105 – Johnny Cage – Mortal Kombat
106 – Road Runner – Road Runner In Death Valley Rally
107 – George – Rampage
108 – Waldo – The Great Waldo Search
109 – Ristar – Ristar
110 – Agent Albatross – Rolling Thunder
111 – Goro – Mortal Kombat
112 – Sparkster –Rocket Knight Adventures
113 – Scooby Doo – Scooby Doo
114 – Heels – Head Over Heels
115 – Skate – Streets Of Rage 3
116 – Tails – Sonic The Hedgehog 2
117 – Bear Hugger – Super Punch Out!
118 – Master Higgins – Super Adventure Island
119 – Willow – Willow
120 – Zeke – Zombie's Ate My Neighbours
121 – Sir Arthur – Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
122 – Wendy O Koopa – Super Mario World
123 – Axel – Streets of Rage II
124 – Michael Jackson – Moonwalker
125 – Red Yoshi – Super Mario World
126 – Dr Zan – Streets Of Rage 3
127 – Zombie – Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
128 – The Incredible Hulk – Marvel Super Heroes
129 – Tanooki Mario – Super Mario Bros. 3
130 – Aero – Aero The Acrobat
131 – Alex Kidd – Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle
132 – Alfred Chicken – Alfred Chicken
133 – Knuckles – Sonic The Hedgehog 3
134 – Bonk – Super Bonk
135 – Chuck Rock – Chuck Rock
136 – Chuck D Head – Decapattack
137 – Raymond – Ghostbusters
138 – Warrior – Gauntlet
139 – Ness – Mother
140 – Mr Nutz – Mr Nutz
141 – Joe Musashi – The Revenge Of Shinobi
142 – Poo – Mother
143 – Geoman – The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja
144 – Bowser – Super Mario World
145 – Scrooge McDuck – Duck Tales
146 – Spider-Man – Spider-Man: The Videogame
147 – Zool – Zool
148 – Rick – Splatterhouse II
149 – Player 1 – Forgotten Worlds
150 – Pac-Man – Pac-Man

